

# ADELAIDE INSTITUTE

PO Box 3300  
Adelaide 5067  
Australia  
Mob: 61+401692057  
Email: [info@adelaideinstitute.org](mailto:info@adelaideinstitute.org)  
Web: <http://www.adelaideinstitute.org>

Online  
ISSN 1440-9828



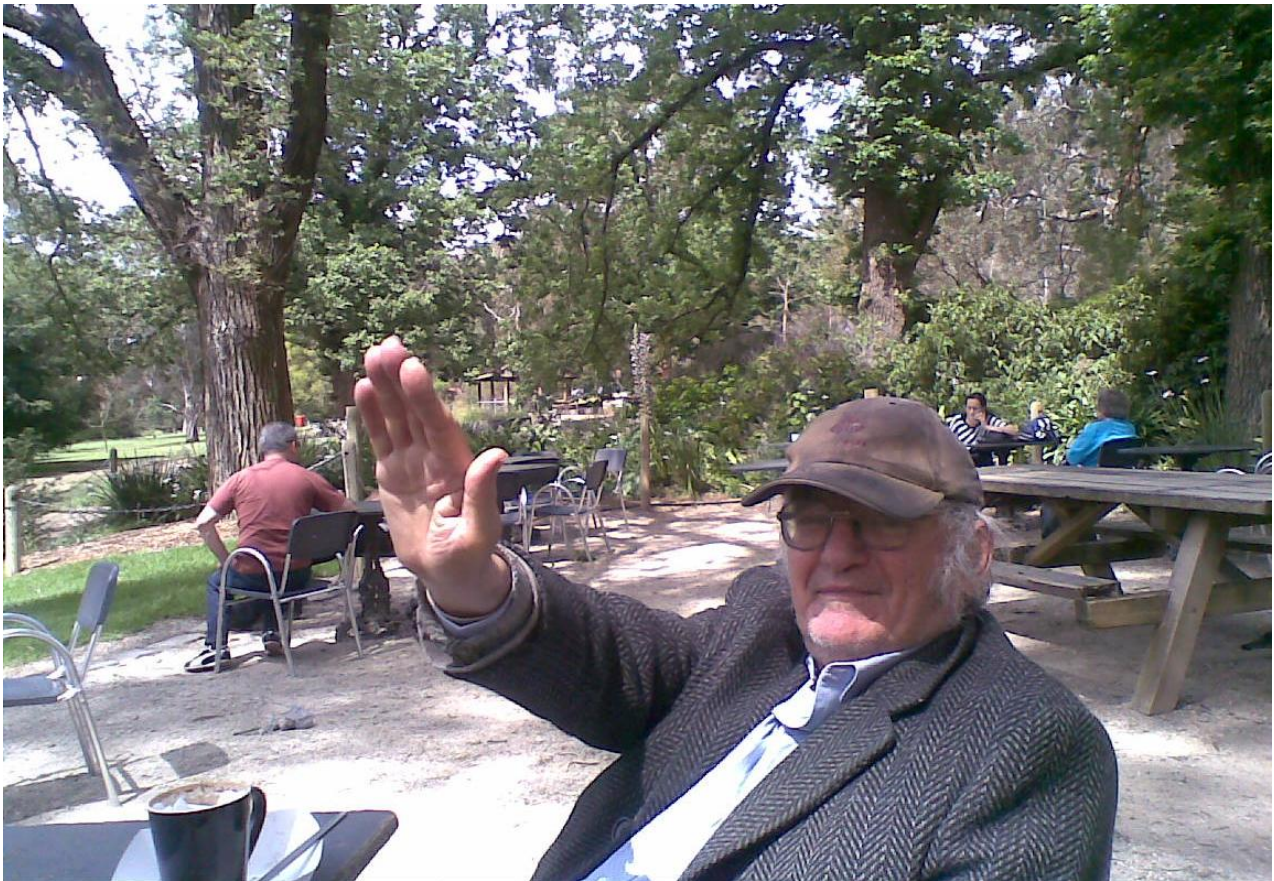
August 2013 No 708

---

## IN MEMORIAM

# John Tuson Bennett

**12 November 1936 – 22 July 2013**



>>Farewell dear friend, John, the Valkyrie have taken you to Walhalla<<

---

**THE PERSECUTION OF A DISSIDENT**

# John Bennett – an Eccentric Life

By John Pasquarelli - [john.pasquarelli@gmail.com](mailto:john.pasquarelli@gmail.com)

## Foreword

Having been brought up in a safe conservative environment satisfying the standard definition of 'bourgeois', John Bennett quickly followed the standard path of rebellion ventured on by so many with his background. Being branded a 'communist' at prestigious Geelong Grammar School by none less than Kerry and Clyde Packer was a badge of honour that Bennett proudly bore for the early and middle part of his adult life. Why did the athletic Bennett who captained the First Eighteen at Geelong Grammar succumb to alcohol and why did losing his virginity become such a grinding torment? Why did Bennett the brilliant law student shackle his ankle to his desk at Trinity College and toss the key out the window? Bennett's life journey is strewn with emotional and political landmines that demand answers to the questions raised.

What led to Bennett being described as 'an unpleasant eccentric' – 'a squalid nuisance' – 'a lone wolf malcontent' – 'a freak of nature' and 'possibly more evil than Himmler and Pol Pot.'? Why did Derryn Hinch call him 'scum'? Why did Philip Adams hope that the CSIRO could find a cure for Bennett's dissident thoughts? Once branded a communist, why was he later called a Nazi when he had previously been a fervent supporter of Israel and the Jewish cause? What led to Bennett enjoying the confidence of the famous B.A. Santamaria and why did he have lunch with noted Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey and British historian David Irving? Why did some of Bennett's ex-girlfriends avoid him in the street and hysterically refuse him entry to their home? Who was the QC later to become a judge who spat on

Bennett in William Street, Melbourne? Having never verbally abused or physically provoked anyone in his life, why was Bennett the victim of several unprovoked and serious physical attacks in public places? Who did John Bennett so annoy that two attempts were made to sabotage the steering of his car?

John Bennett's eccentric life began in a fairly normal Australian way in the bustling farming town of Horsham in Victoria's Wimmera District. He was born on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 1936 in the Wimmera Base Hospital. The Bennett's and his mother's family the Stouts migrated to Australia from Scotland and in later life he was interested enough in his heritage to write a paper entitled 'The Scots in Australia' which was published in the magazine *Endeavour*.....

Bennett had three sisters, one older, two younger and has never indicated any unpleasant memories of living in a female dominated household. He was however very highly strung, putting saucepans against his bedroom door so that he would be alerted to any intruders. He says that even today he sometimes wakes in the night shouting 'help.'

Both his grandfather and father were Horsham lawyers and both became local mayors. His mother was the daughter of Thomas Young and her grandfather operated five real estate agencies in the Wimmera, Mallee and Western District but these enterprises were destroyed by the Great Depression. His paternal grandfather also became a victim of that economic maelstrom when, totally demoralised by his financial woes he laid himself down to rest on a busy railway track.

Bennett's early education was at Horsham Primary and High Schools

and for those who can still understand, he and his peers led Ginger Meggs or Huckleberry Finn type lifestyles – well before the era of 'ghetto blasters' and video games. At five years of age he was ordered by his teacher to stand in the corner of the room for ten minutes as punishment for pulling a chair from under a girl as she was about to sit down – maybe in these mad, litigious times, he will receive a writ for damages if his victim is still alive and when she discovers a 'no win, no fee' ambulance chasing lawyer. Swimming and fishing was 300 yards away from the Bennett family home in the Wimmera River and in the timber yard behind 6 Smith Street (where he lived), the kids played cowboys and Indians with bows and arrows surviving several near misses. These childhood close shaves were precursors for much more serious Bennett 'near misses' in later years. A treed area at the rear of 6 Smith Street was where Tarzan type man traps were dug, snaring several mates – another potential legal minefield in present times. At home there was a cricket pitch on the back lawn as well as a coop for homing pigeons and kick to kick football was a regular event next to the local Army Drill hall – a scene reminiscent in a way of that depicted in the famous Russell Drysdale painting 'The Cricketers'. The Bennett family often travelled to Portland in Western Victoria during Christmas holidays where Bennett fished for barracouta from a boat belonging to a friend of his father's. A small 12 foot family boat which was built by Bennett and his cousin Ian Bennett at Geelong Grammar School was kept in a shed at 80 Bennett Road, Horsham and used for fishing trips to Lake Wartook in the Grampians and Natimuk Lake as well as Doch

Lake and Green Lake – all of which, apart from Wartook, have been dry for the past eight to ten years.

Bennett's father, Ian, was a keen golfer and the driving force behind the establishment of the new Horsham Golf Links located on sandy hills near Horsham which had once been ancient seabed and a room at the Horsham Golf Club was dedicated to him in May 2007. Bennett became involved in a lot of hack work on this project, helping dig out channels, in the process discovering fossilised sea shells, collecting sheep manure from underneath shearing sheds and assisting when tip trucks unloaded topsoil on the fairways.

He spent 2 years at Horsham High School and in the days when corporal punishment was the rule, was strapped on more than one occasion for being cheeky to teachers. He played the piano from the time he was eight until his thirteenth year when he suddenly gave up, responding to the taunts of other boys who said it was 'sissy' to play the piano, so the concert halls of Europe were deprived of his presence. His religious education also did not produce the desired results hoped for by his regular church-going family. Being staunch Presbyterians, the Bennetts had a family pew at the local church handed down by Bennett's maternal grandmother Mabel Young, nee Stout. He was required to attend at church every Sunday which he did with an air of resignation. Attempting to cooperate with his family, Bennett accepted a part in a nativity play with disastrous results. The part could have not been more uncomplicated. At a certain point in proceedings he was required to put his hand in a sack and produce a bowl but such was his lack of concentration in performing this very simple task, that it took a burst of very audible prompting

from the wings before he came to with a start and did his thing. He has told me that his scepticism about Christianity was confirmed at about this time.

Bennett's happy and carefree Ginger Meggs' existence in Horsham ended as he took his place in the Bennett family succession. As both his father and his uncle Don Bennett had boarded at Geelong Grammar School, his fate was sealed and he was dispatched to the prestigious school, residing in Cuthbertson House as had his father and uncle. Geelong Grammar has played a very significant part in Australia's history, particularly in the political, business and arts arenas. The list of ex – Geelong Grammarians reads like a Who's Who. Kerry and Clyde Packer, Alexander Downer, Tim Burstall, Jonathan Shier, John Gorton, and many others – as well as people like the son of a prominent Western District grazier who after failing spectacularly at school, was packed off to PNG where he womanised with the locals in an outrageous way and performed a series of confidence tricks on the naïve expatriate community.

Geelong Grammar quickly became John Bennett's personal Gulag as he succumbed to the pressures of entering this strange and often unpleasant environment. He became a fellow travelling Communist due to the influence of his history teacher. Dr Darling, the famous principal of Geelong Grammar often employed left-wing teachers like Manning Clark who in turn became powerful forces within their spheres of influence. Boarding schools affected their inmates in various ways but to Bennett, Geelong Grammar became more and more a penitentiary with icy morning showers, cross-country runs, prayers before a palate demoralising breakfast and Chapel at 9.00am every Sunday. These

rituals only served to confirm his atheism and his radical political views. Despite his affinity for teachers with a left bent, Dr Darling as the head of an Anglican school was a staunch Christian and Bennett's demonstrated atheism during religious instruction classes infuriated him.

With the formal school discipline came punishment for Bennett's anti-establishment stance. He was caned in the toilets at 11.00pm one evening by a prefect Don Casey, the son of a future Governor General of Australia and when Bennett asked 'why?', Casey replied, 'Nothing specific, it's just your general attitude.'

A boy called Malcolm McLeod forced Bennett's head into a lavatory bowl and pulled the chain on at least five separate occasions. In the late 1960s Bennett met Don Casey by chance in a hardware shop and asked him if he was still sadistically belting people.

At the opera one evening Bennett met Malcolm McLeod and his wife and in a loud voice asked him if he was still shoving people's heads into lavatory bowls. McLeod's wife looked at Bennett as if he was mad. During his participation in a school debate, Bennett argued for the nationalisation of industry and the abolition of the Monarchy. Cries of 'throw Bennett out' came from Kerry and Clyde Packer but democracy prevailed and instead the two brothers were ejected from the audience. In today's times Bennett could claim that he was the victim of bullying as even his English teacher joined in, referring to him in class as the 'Mopoke' because he was so unsmiling. In our litigious, crazy world, Bennett would now surely have enough legal ammunition to shake Geelong Grammar School to its very foundations. I might suggest this to him.

On the positive side of his time at Geelong Grammar, Bennett had

better than average academic success. He sat for and passed nine subjects for the School Leaving certificate – the year before Matriculation or final year – and was equal Dux of the School taking six subjects when he matriculated. As if to add insult to injury in respect of his tormentors, Bennett was appointed captain of the Geelong Grammar School First Eighteen football team. Dr Darling had the final word in his last school report. 'Bennett is potentially a great man. He is sensitive – unduly so. I fear that he will fall into a series of holes.'

Release from Geelong Grammar took John Bennett to the next tier of his education – Law School at Melbourne University which at the time was the only Law School in Victoria. He took up residence at the Anglican Church controlled Trinity College on the Melbourne campus. An early attempt was made to recruit him for the University Blues A grade football team but he declined simply because now freed of the enforced discipline experienced at Geelong Grammar, he didn't want to train and play every week. He did play some games for Trinity College and the Old Geelong Grammarians team which had been established by his uncle Don Bennett. He usually played ruck-rover or on the wing but could not be accused of being a team player. During the three quarter time rev up by the coach, Bennett would sit apart from the rest of the team, more times than not taking some restorative swigs from a secreted bottle of sherry. He had very quickly developed an intense relationship with alcohol. On one occasion when he had dodged a game with Trinity, Bennett went to the match as a spectator and barracked for their opponents Newman College. On returning to his study at Trinity he found that all his belongings had been thrown out of the window of

his room into the muddy yard as punishment for this act of gross treachery.

Towards the end of his first year at Melbourne University, Bennett was knocked out during an Old Grammarians game. His pupils did not respond to light and he was operated on by surgeon Mr Bryant-Curtis. Most of his hair was shaved off leaving a pony tail which in those days looked ridiculous.

At this stage and at the age of 20, Bennett's sex life was non-existent due mainly to the single sex, almost monasterial environment at Geelong Grammar which was located at Corio, a rural area some distance from the city of Geelong. His early attempts at relationships were like episodes from a Mr Bean movie. Taking a girl from Trinity's sister college, Janet Clarke Hall, to the play 'Charlie's Aunt', Bennett clumsily groped her for most of the performance and when he kissed her goodnight, he dramatically called her 'my impassionata', which was a line from the play. After several tortured phone calls he was told 'never phone me up again.'

Not to be deterred in his pursuit, Bennett rang up a friend of the girl who had rejected him and told her to pass on the message that he had to see the object of his passion for a coffee, as what he had to say 'would make the phone lines so hot that they would burn up.' This scintillating line ensured that there was no coffee. Despite all this and for reasons only known to the girl in question, she ran after Bennett a few days later when he was headed towards Union House on the campus. Frozen with fear he took cover behind a tree while the girl entered the quadrangle, looking nonplussed at his sudden disappearance. He encountered this girl again in the library when he and she were the only occupants sitting opposite each other. In a paralysed state, Bennett shielded

his face in his hands. One can only wonder all these years later what the object of his affection thought what on earth he was on about.

Despite his tortured emotions and a growing predilection for alcohol, Bennett still performed well academically, topping the year in all his first year subjects and sharing the Exhibition Prize for Legal History and Introduction to Legal Method.

Students with such a record were normally appointed automatically to the editorial board of the student law magazine *Res Judicatae* but Bennett was considered so difficult and 'way out' that the invitation was never made.

During his second year at Trinity, Bennett was able to have his own bedroom but despite a growing desire for his privacy, agreed to share with Tim Tyler, another ex-Geelong Grammarian. Privacy was very necessary to accommodate Bennett's particular lifestyle. He had increased his drinking habit and was taking a lot of fortified wine like port and sherry and was masturbating almost every day in order to relieve the terrible frustration resulting from his almost pathetic inability to have a successful relationship with a woman. To make matters worse he had started to spend days on end without sleep helped by taking a lot of No-Doz tablets which proved to be addictive.

Seeing Marlon Brando in *On The Waterfront* led to Bennett assuming his persona in the movie and he started to mimic the famous method actor so much so that he earned the nickname 'Marlon.'

He told the girl he had taken to see 'Charlie's Aunt', that his university life was 'first year work, second year women, third year wine.' She did not seem to be impressed by his braggadocio. He still kept on coming across the girl he had previously avoided by hiding behind

a tree, as they both went about their business on the campus. More than once she gave Bennett the impression of wanting to stop and talk but he felt so inferior and inadequate that any discourse was impossible. At a dance when he was very drunk and full of Dutch courage, he took to the floor with this girl who had been obviously speaking to the 'Charlie's Aunt' girl 'Is it women or wine this year?' she said, as she pushed him away. Bennett felt as if he was going to have a panic attack. All he could say in a choking voice was, 'I'm terribly afraid of you,' as she left him stranded and looking stupid in the middle of the dance floor.

In a sort of mad desperation he later phoned this girl asking her if she was 'doing anything with her body and mind this afternoon.' 'Who is this?' she replied cautiously. 'You probably wouldn't know me,' he choked out as he hung up. He slumped in his chair, totally crushed.

Other aspects of Bennett's social life were quite normal – even bordering on the bourgeoisie. He saw a lot of continental films and played cards with friends. On reflection it was a miracle he passed all subjects in second year law. The once fit footballer was starting to look a physical wreck with hollow cheeks that remain until this day. He was also starting to suffer from an intolerance to even mildly cool weather and began wearing an overcoat, only removing it when he felt really hot. This led to Bennett being very visible on warmish days when he still felt vulnerable to perceived cold or draughts. Bennett jokes about Bismarck having had a phobia about draughts. An ABC file on Bennett refers to his excessive use of clothes. In an *Age* report on the Hope QC inquiry into ASIO, he was referred to as 'the eccentrically dressed Mr Bennett with his cloth cap and knee length overcoat.'

After having topped the class in all his first year law subjects, Bennett's change of lifestyle dictated that it could only be all downhill from there. In third year he managed to pick up an Exhibition in Evidence but he had made his run too early and never really tried to study hard again. Study became a tedious grind, all too easy to escape from and to counter this he shackled his right ankle to his desk in his Trinity College study sparking off a spate of new gossip about his eccentricity. A resident at International House at the time, I remember how this anecdote travelled like wildfire around Melbourne University.

The girl, who remained the unknowing object of Bennett's unrequited love, started dating a suave and sophisticated law student six years her senior. It was an incredible coincidence that the married children of the girl of Bennett's dreams and those of the *Charlie's Aunt* girl, given the number of law firms in Victoria, would end up working for Bennett's father's firm, Power & Bennett. During his third year at Melbourne University one of Bennett's best friends, Ross Beaton, killed himself. Beaton had told Bennett that he should read more novels such as *The Stranger* by Albert Camus. The anti-hero in *The Stranger* about to be hanged, realises that he is in fact happy and relaxed with his situation.

Bennett took Beaton's bereaved girlfriend to a dance at Trinity College where she hugged him and then suggested they go back to his study where she asked him to make love to her. Bennett stood there in the centre of the room trying to make sense of things and heard himself barely mumble to her that he didn't know how to. Frustrated and furious, the girl swept up her things and went home in a taxi. Bennett's obviously deep-

seated problems with being unable to perform sexually, persisted even on a trip to Cairns with John Ansett, the son of Sir Reginald and brother of Bob.

John Ansett charmed the local Ansett agent in Cairns to the point where a company bus was laid on for him. With Ansett driving, the two students merrily toured Cairns and its environs, singing into the bus' public address system and picking up hitchhikers, providing them with a free taxi service. During their stay in Cairns Bennett met a girl from the NSW town of Orange on the beach and got on so well with her that in a short space of time she started to stroke his by then very hard penis barely contained in his Speedos. Back in her room it was all a replay of the previous disastrous effort in his Trinity College study, with Bennett mumbling away, telling yet another girl that he didn't know how to make love.

Bennett and his virginity finally parted company during his last month at university. He found himself in a taxi with the nurse daughter of a Federal MP who socialised with the Bennetts. During the trip to a nurses' residential home in Gatehouse Street, Parkville, the girl put her hand on Bennett's leg and he began thinking that something was going to happen. Happen it did, on the ground floor waiting room of the residence when, with Bennett sitting in a chair, the girl unzipped his fly and gave him oral sex. It was early in the morning and at that time any of the nurses could have walked in through the front door. Oblivious to the possible embarrassment, Bennett orgasmed and in his words 'had a huge ejaculation.'

On his last night at Trinity College, Bennett had sex twice with the girl who had educated him in such a matter of fact and very professional way. He realised that he was



dealing with a very experienced person and would find out later that her reputation was the stuff of legends and that she was in great demand. Sadly, not so many years later, this very kind and generous girl killed herself.

The day after his night of lovemaking, Bennett packed up and drove away from Trinity College. His university days were behind him and it was vacation time before the new lawyer started his articles with a legal firm. He was on his way to a farm in Gippsland where he would labour, dipping sheep. Tired by the previous night's exertions he dozed off at the wheel more than once and was woken by the tyres running into the gravel at the side of the bitumen. Luck was still on his side.

Bennett and seven other law graduates obtained an honours degree. Five of these later became Supreme Court judges, a sixth to the County Court. Bennett describes himself as 'the odd man out.' He was articled to Weigall Crowther, the Melbourne agents of Bennett's father's firm, Power and Bennett. Bennett was still very much a Communist and put more than one nose out of joint with his predictions of the coming Communist revolution. The solicitor who was responsible for Bennett's articles lectured him regularly as to how he would never make a satisfactory solicitor. The legal world was shocked when this very same solicitor was sent to gaol for embezzling from his employer. Bennett's alcoholism had ravaged his features so much that a senior solicitor at Weigalls thought that he was in his early thirties when in fact he was only 21. Bennett took up part time jobs tutoring in Legal History at Melbourne University and teaching at Ringwood High School. In those days, a university degree allowed the holder to teach at various levels without any teacher training. Bennett pushed a hardline

Marxist view of Legal History and let it be known at Ringwood High that he was a Communist and an Atheist. The world was then in the grip of the Cold War and it was not long before Bennett received a letter from the Victorian Education Department advising him that he would never be employed by the department again.

#### COOBER PEDY

That beautiful shimmering gemstone opal was discovered at Coober Pedy in South Australia in 1915. Desperate white men worked and lived underground, sinking shafts up to one hundred feet deep and tunnelling horizontally using explosives and hand winches, gouging out the precious stone with hand picks. Light was provided by smelly carbide lamps. The work was gutting manual labour until machinery was utilised. Living conditions were primitive and harsh and obtaining clean drinking water was always a major concern.

John McCormack who is now a barrister in Darwin pulled out of a three man expedition to Coober Pedy in 1959 and was replaced by Bennett who had thrown in his other teaching and tutorial jobs. The other two members were Peter Sykes, a commerce graduate who went on to become involved in the UK TV production of *Steptoe & Son* and myself who dropped out of law at Melbourne University and left Coober Pedy for New Guinea, coming to some prominence in Australian politics in 1996 when I was political adviser and speechwriter to Pauline Hanson.

I had bought a 1936 Chrysler 66 in excellent condition for one hundred pounds from a deceased estate and the expedition left Melbourne for Coober Pedy, detouring to Horsham where Bennett still had contacts. An afternoon was spent on a local lake where I test fired a Colt .45 automatic pistol. That evening at a party in Horsham, Bennett was told

by an agitated young woman 'Why don't you go? We were happy until you came here.'

Driving from Adelaide to Coober Pedy, the car carried cases of gelignite plus a box of detonators packed in sawdust that sat between the driver and the front seat passenger. In 1959 the only two substantial buildings above ground at Coober Pedy were the Ampol and Shell service stations – rambling structures of corrugated iron that were ovens during the day and freezers at night when the desert temperatures dropped. Bennett, Sykes and I camped in a tent bought from Sam Bear's camping and surplus shop in Melbourne but dusty and gusty winds soon put paid to the flimsy canvas shelter and we shifted underground to a disused, shallow mine. Attempts were made to enlarge the underground dwelling by using explosives but extravagant charges collapsed the diggings, burying some of the expedition gear. A more suitable dugout was found and after obtaining miners' licences, mining was begun on the shallower ground at the Eight Mile field.

Initially digging and winching by hand, a shaft sixty-five feet deep was dug and apart from some traces of opal the tons of excavated sandstone on top of their shaft was all we had to show. Some years later, my father who was a medico in Adelaide was told by a patient from Coober Pedy that other miners had deepened the shaft on the claim and had found substantial opal, one of the group later crashing to his death in his Jaguar E-Type whilst under the influence of drugs.

A sure sign that opal had been found on a claim was flagged by the local Aborigines. At the direction of the Aboriginal men, their women and young children would squat at the top of the shaft and 'noodle' through the dumped

sandstone, their keen eyes looking for chips of opal which would be stored in tobacco tins and sold when the opal buyers arrived at Coober Pedy. At the end of every day the men would appear to collect the tins of opal chips.

We all noticed that the Aborigines were in poor shape and a visiting bush nurse told us that venereal disease was rife as was alcoholism and women bashing. Aboriginal women and young girls were offered in exchange for methylated spirits as at that time it was illegal for Aborigines to drink or be offered conventional alcohol. The women were constantly brutalised by their menfolk and the puffed up, purple welts on faces and bodies told their sad story. A couple of women had terrible facial scarring caused by having their faces held down in a campfire by a monster. This was in 1959 and it has taken 48 years for any government to take the determined action required to save original Australians from the disaster of separatism and the clash of cultures.

In 1959, Coober Pedy's population was a mix of Anglo-Australians and post WWII migrants from Yugoslavia, Greece and other European countries. The dreaded tax man was the common enemy and for a while it was thought that we may have been undercover tax investigators. This could have had dangerous implications as opal field feuds were often settled by tossing a stick of gelignite into a dugout.

Other colourful Coober Pedy characters were Ron Gough, a laconic and lanky ex-tomato grower from Bowen, Queensland and his cousin Jim Dwyer. A struck-off drug-addicted pharmacist and a seriously alcoholic Russian who spent all his opal money on Port Augusta prostitutes added to the melting pot. Bennett arranged for Gough and Dwyer to meet up with Penny Ralph and Ann Knappett when the miners took a break and

drove to Melbourne. The two young women were undergraduates at Melbourne University. Ralph later married an international Communist and went to live in Cuba and in the mid 1980s Ann Knappett was married to me for a few years.

In the evenings after we had cleaned up after a hard days mining, Bennett, Sykes and I obtained credit at the Ampol service station and store by coaching the daughter of Mr Marks the owner. The Shell establishment directly opposite the Ampol setup was operated by Jim and Edna Brewster who were not all that popular with some of the miners. Both the stores bought opal and gave credit for fuel and provisions which was redeemed for opal when a strike was made. Like all mining fields there were plenty of defaulters who did a 'runner' under the cover of darkness.

Living at Coober Pedy gave us a definite taste of what pioneering life was about. Good washing and drinking water was a priority. The South Australian government in the 1920s had constructed an underground dam – a large saucer shaped excavation roofed over to mitigate against evaporation. It cost 10 shillings to pump a 44 gallon drum but disaster struck when a drunken Aboriginal crawled into the dam and drowned – it being several days before his corpse was discovered. The authorities closed the dam until it was pumped out and sterilised and we all had to drive for miles with containers to find potable bore water.

There was plenty of spaghetti and kangaroo stew which I shot and cooked but Bennett complained that this diet and more particularly the caviar that my mother sent in food parcels was responsible for his attacks of gastritis. Claret in small barrels was brought in from Clare in the Barossa Valley and riesling

from the same area was cooled in canvas water bags and used as a thirst quencher whilst mining underground.

Bennett and I noticed that Peter Sykes was starting to show signs of fatigue when we were mining. It was not long before Sykes collapsed, possibly due to heat exhaustion and physical stress and after some discussion it was decided that he should return to Melbourne. Sykes had befriended a visiting American and Bennett and I waved him off in the American's large, air conditioned Buick, on his way back to Melbourne and thence to the UK to his involvement in TV direction and production such as *Steptoe & Son*. Peter Sykes recently died in the UK after a long battle with prostate cancer.

After our first effort at mining at the Eight Mile, Bennett and I joined forces with Peter Murray who was working on an adjoining claim and had a petrol engine powered winch. As luck would have it, some good quality opal was found quite soon, prompting Bennett to say of the amiable Murray 'no good deed goes unpunished' – a saying that Bennett still uses today. We felt that we were now really part of the mining community as we looked with some satisfaction at the Aborigines noodling on our mullock heap. This opal was sold to the flamboyant Greg Sherman who ran a family gemstone business in Sydney.

Bennett and I were parked in the Chrysler in the open parking area between the two petrol stations when I started complaining of violent stomach pains. Sweating and vomiting, I was obviously in trouble and demanded to be driven to the Woomera Rocket Range complex which had a hospital. The boyfriend of the Ampol storekeeper's daughter did the taxi work and despite my obvious illness, the party was turned away by the security guards at the main

gate. Maybe the guards thought that the dirt grimed and bearded Bennett and I had ulterior motives. The next stop was the railway station at Kingoonya which had attached a small bush hospital. I was admitted and after cleaning up found myself in bed next to a restrained and raving New Australian who had been lost in the desert for a few days. Bennett dosed down in a cargo shed at the end of the station platform. Early that evening, I overheard the nurse in charge speaking on the radio to a doctor and the words 'appendectomy' and 'operation' were used.

Convinced that I would not survive in that environment, I told Bennett and we decided to proceed to Adelaide by train the next day and pick up the Chrysler which had been driven there by another friend. Bennett found out later that the storekeeper's boyfriend had hit a kangaroo on his way back to Coober Pedy and resultant by chance Police assistance led to the car being identified as stolen leaving the driver without wheels. Bennett's 'no good deed' mantra was invoked again.

In the early morning I decamped from the hospital and its remaining delirious patient and with Bennett boarded the train which had come across from Perth.

In remission, I drove back to Melbourne in the Chrysler, dropping Bennett off at Horsham where his parents still lived. Arriving in Melbourne at 'Weary' Dunlop's consulting rooms I found myself at St Andrew's hospital having my rupturing appendix removed by the great man.

After recuperating at my parents' home in Kew, I was on the road again, picking Bennett up at Horsham and heading back to the opal fields where we camped temporarily in a dugout that had been vacated by two miners who had gone south for a break. This

proved to be a bad move as armed friends of the two confronted Bennett and me but Bennett's diplomacy saved the day and the matter was settled by him offering tin mugs of barely cool waterbag white wine all around.

With Peter Murray going south for a break, Bennett and I decided to head in the opposite direction and drive to Alice Springs. The Chrysler ran like clockwork and in those days the main road was a treacherous band of meandering parallel tracks full of dangerously deep potholes covered with powdery red bulldust. Pulling up at Kulgera which consisted of a general store and petrol pump and a licence to sell liquor, Bennett and I each bought a twenty-six ounce bottle of beer and started to drink inside the store. At that time Bennett, I and the storekeeper were most probably the only whites for miles. Quoting a regulation from the Liquor Act, the storekeeper ordered us out into the scorching sun where we quickly emptied our bottles and much chastened, went on our way.

The Alice in 1959 was still very much a frontier town and Bennett and I couldn't but notice the degradation of the local Aborigines particularly in their squalid camps in the Todd River bed. It was obvious that it was easy for them to obtain large quantities of methylated spirits.

Bennett and I met up with a contractor who was carrying out the construction upgrading of the Alice Springs airport and associated infrastructure. After a meal in the company canteen the businessman gave us a guided tour in his American limousine, confessing that he was on the brink of bankruptcy. At that stage neither Bennett nor I had operated businesses but suddenly found ourselves giving economic advice to the businessman who listened attentively. In his desperation he

may have thought two sages had wandered in out of the desert to provide his salvation.

Camping down on the banks of the Todd River, I was pot-shooting some bottles with my Colt .45 when a couple of the local police turned up. Australia in 1959 was a more relaxed and different country than the one we live in today. After exchanging pleasantries the police accompanied us to a local café and for a while it looked as we would all compete for the favours of a couple of the local white girls!

After our whirlwind tour of Alice Springs, Bennett and I headed back to Coober Pedy when disaster struck. I was driving too fast for the conditions on a sidetrack of the meandering main road when I dropped the front end of the Chrysler into a deep hole hidden by the powdery red bulldust. In the days of no seat belts Bennett and I were thrown around violently but the serious damage was done to the car. The heavily built solid cast steel front axle was seriously bent close to the front left wheel. It was impossible to steer the car ahead but I found that by reversing slowly it was possible to make some progress. Driving in this way we made our way back to the main road but by this time the engine was boiling so it was a matter of waiting for someone to come along. After an hour or so, a battered old Reo semi-trailer appeared out of clouds of red dust and by using a convenient mound of earth as a ramp, the Chrysler was reversed up onto the planked deck of the trailer only to have the front end drop through some rotted boards, badly holing the sump. Back at Coober Pedy the battered, once pristine Chrysler 66 was unloaded. The car had come from a deceased estate in Melbourne and had very low mileage. Its big, straight six cylinder engine was hardly run in and being slow revving, was ideal



for travelling long distances at reasonable speeds.

There were plenty of wrecked vehicles scattered around the opal fields and an old De Soto which belonged to the Chrysler stable yielded up an identical front axle and sump cover – testament to American production line efficiency. During the repairs Bennett accidentally released his grip on the axle causing me to hit my hand with a large ball pein hammer, seriously bruising it. Bennett was concerned that I would react as I had when he accidentally dropped a large steel hand auger down our Eight Mile field shaft when I was standing bareheaded at the bottom waiting to hook up a bucket of mullock to the winch. I would have been certainly very seriously injured if not killed had the auger struck me squarely on the top of my head. On that occasion and incandescent with rage, I had climbed up out of the shaft and fired several shots from the Colt .45 over and around Bennett's head at close range.

Bennett and I had been on the opal fields for nearly six months and 1959 was drawing to a close. We loaded up the Chrysler and decided to return home for Christmas. Leaving at night, I announced our departure by tossing half a stick of gelignite down the pit toilet at the Shell roadhouse. Coober Pedy is today a flourishing tourist town with above ground houses, shopping centre, clubs and pubs and a TAB. I revisited in 1981 to find Ron Gough and a few others had died. Bennett returned for a brief trip in 1964 but has never been back since.

### **BACK TO MELBOURNE**

Back in Melbourne, Bennett moved in with his elder sister Jocelyn who was a nurse and had a flat in South Yarra. My parents were living in Kew but as Jocelyn Bennett was away for a few days, I stayed over at the flat. Still winding down after

the Coober Pedy expedition, we spent time catching up with friends. One afternoon I was sitting on the lavatory reading, when a loud explosion reverberated through the small flat, accompanied by a cloud of plaster dust and cordite fumes. I remember croaking, 'are you all right?' as I stumbled into the bedroom, my shorts still tangled around my ankles.

Bennett had opened my small fibre suitcase which contained the Colt.45 automatic pistol and had managed to work the safety off. Defying all firearms safety practice, I had carried the gun with a live round in the breech. Toying with the lethal weapon, Bennett at one stage looked down at the end of the barrel before pointing the pistol at the wall and pulling the trigger. When I came into the room, Bennett was staring in bewildered amazement at a large hole in the plastered brick wall some three metres from him. Plaster dust was settling on his head and shoulders. A frantic search for the spent bullet sent Bennett and me into near shock when it was found in the fibre suitcase on the single bed right next to where Bennett was still sitting. The silly accident came within a few inches of the Coroner's Court and the messy affair would have involved the previous owner of the gun, a person now very well known in Australian business and literary circles.

After collecting our senses, Bennett and I proceeded to repair and repaint the damaged wall before Jocelyn Bennett returned the next day.

A WWII friend of my father had arrived in Melbourne recruiting for the New Guinea Administration and my father who had served in New Guinea suggested that I sign up as a Cadet Patrol Officer. After satisfying my new employer that I was sound of mind and limb, I was ready for my next adventure. Prior

to leaving Melbourne I suggested to my parents that Bennett come over to the Pasquarelli house at Kew for drinks and a meal but my father who had heard from me about Bennett's politics said, 'I won't have that Communist in my house.'

Marching time while he was settling back in Melbourne, Bennett obtained a small grant to conduct a survey of two hundred people on their attitude to authority. It was at this time that Bennett began a lifelong relationship with seriously dodgy cars. The first was a rear-engine Renault 750 that boiled so often people thought that it was an experimental steam car. On one occasion one of its front wheels fell off while Bennett was driving in heavy traffic. There were plenty of parties at the South Yarra flat and on one occasion when Bennett wandered into the bedroom he came upon student Germaine Greer performing oral sex on a groaning man Bennett recognised as a philosophy tutor from Melbourne University.

Jocelyn Bennett was engaged to Frank Pocock, a wool classer and ex-public schoolboy who barely got on with his brother-in-law to be. The big day had finally arrived and on the wedding eve at the South Yarra flat Pocock had mused about where he was going to sleep that night. 'Why not sleep with Jocelyn?' Bennett said, whereupon an affronted Pocock spluttered, 'Oh you rotter', as he decked Bennett with a right hook.

With the newlyweds in residence at the South Yarra flat, Bennett took a room at a property in Alexandria Avenue. His Jewish landlady insisted on Bennett taking her to nightclubs but when he refused her overtures, Bennett found himself barred from having female visitors to his room. This sexual curfew led to Bennett having sex al fresco in Princes Park, Carlton with the sex addicted daughter of a Federal

Liberal MP. A nurse at the Women's Hospital, this generous and kind young woman who gave lustful pleasure to all and sundry on the Melbourne University campus, later committed suicide. Bennett's next lover was Marika, the daughter of a German officer who had been killed on the Russian Front in WWII. Bennett escaped the punishment of his Jewish landlady by renting converted stables at 89 Caroline Street, South Yarra where the concrete courtyard had to be regularly hosed down after parties. Ever the avid live theatre-goer, Bennett found it hard to avoid becoming the centre of attention even when sitting in an audience. Watching Norman Kaye of *Man of Flowers* fame at the St Martins Theatre in South Yarra, Bennett was hit on the back of his head with an umbrella by an irate theatregoer, annoyed that Bennett had not stood at the playing of *God Save The Queen*. Flirting with the idea of gracing the stage, Bennett was given small parts in three plays by the ABC producer, Christopher Muir. Playing a Negro with a blackened and bearded face, he startled friends in a South Yarra milk bar with his ostentatious arrival.

On another occasion at a Prahran theatre, Bennett played the leader of the Yellow Ants in the play *The Insects*. Eccentric poet Patrick Alexander played the leader of the Blacks and was supposed to lightly kick Bennett in the final act. In the throes of a nervous breakdown, Alexander kicked Bennett really hard, badly bruising his right leg. Babbling incoherently, the hapless poet actor was led off stage and taken away for medical treatment as the curtain was dropped, ending Bennett's brief acting career.

Bennett was still seeing Marika and on one occasion when he was back at the Park St flat she climbed through a window into his bedroom. This coupling resulted in

a pregnancy and an abortion at a time when such a procedure had its dangers. Taking Marika to a party outside his hometown of Horsham, Bennett crashed his car whilst drunk – careering across the Western Highway and spearing into a gate. Bennett senior noticed the damage to the car as well as finding his son in bed with Marika. What followed then was like an episode from a soapie. Bennett's father discussed with Marika's mother whether the matter should be reported to the police – Bennett was 22 and Marika was thought to be 17. Marika resolved the scandal by producing a book written by her grandfather and inscribed 'to Marika - Summer 1939' which made her about 20.

If the 1960s were an era of sexual liberation, Bennett went with the flow. At a Parkville party in 1969 he met a girl who was in his legal history tutorials in 1958. Having given the girl his address he was mildly surprised when a few hours later she knocked on the door of his Caroline Street residence and got into bed with him. Another girl who went on to be a well known art gallery owner arrived at Bennett's place at 3am and performed fellatio on him – this being his first sexual contact with her.

Bennett settled into the humdrum of the law at Ogge & Co, a firm of solicitors. For four years he did a lot of personal injury work as well as divorce matters and court appearances. As well he completed his honours art course, majoring in political science. James Ogge was waiting for his sons to complete their law degrees and when the first one did so, Bennett was sacked. In those days unfair dismissal was not on the radar.

Applying for a position at Monash University in the Political Science Department and having shaken off the 'Commo' tag, Bennett found himself engaged in a running battle with the Communist influenced

Socialist Left of the Labor Party. This involved giving talks at Monash and on one occasion Albert Langer the then well known activist was in the audience and took exception to Bennett's comments, reacting with loud interjections accusing Bennett of being a stooge for the DLP on the basis that Bennett's recent employer James Ogge was a DLP member. Langer went on to condemn Bennett as being the son of a Toorak millionaire – which was simply not so. Bennett's lack of PR skills and diplomacy was demonstrated when he impatiently fired off an abusive letter to Professor Rufus Davies, the recipient of his job application. The Professor's rejection arrived by prompt return mail.

Bennett's working life is best defined by his involvement in the civil liberties movement when he formed the VCCL in 1966. He was interested in protecting minority controversial opinions no doubt based on his earlier personal experience when he espoused communist views at Geelong Grammar and Melbourne University. His co-founders were Ian Turner, ex-communist and Monash lecturer and Beatrice Faust. Peter Blazey, a homosexual activist who would die from AIDS became assistant secretary.

The foundation meeting was held at the Australian American Club in Melbourne and was attended by 250 people. The guest speaker was Bob St John of the NSW CCL. Members of early committees included Alan Missen later to be a senator, John Button a future ALP minister and likewise Gareth Evans as well as his wife Merran. After the initial euphoria, Bennett found himself doing the lion's share of work involved in the day to day operation of the VCCL.

Subcommittees were formed and regular newsletters issued covering a broad range of issues from police powers to citizen's rights. Regular

committee meetings and AGMs were held during the decade 1966 to 1976. In the late 1970s the meetings became fewer as inertia set in.

The first VCCL president was Douglas Gasking, head of the Philosophy Department at Melbourne University. At odds with Bennett politically, Gasking resigned when Bennett announced that he would be standing for election as an Independent Labor Alliance candidate. The vice president Maurice Ashkenazy QC also resigned at about the same time.

Bennett had been a member of the ALP since the mid 1960s but joined the 'participants' virtually by accident. Coincidentally meeting John Paterson who was on his way to a meeting, Bennett was asked 'are you going tonight?' Tagging along he became a 'participant' and ended up doing most of the research work.

Attending the Victorian State ALP conference in 1967 as a delegate for the Bank Employees Union – which at that time was controlled by Barney Williams, Bennett stood up and yelled out 'the ALP won't win a federal election until Hartley goes.' Receiving a mixed reception Bennett was sat down again by those around him.

Using the newspapers as a battlefield, Bennett wrote many letters attacking Bill Hartley and George Crawford and when interviewed by Bill Peach on *This Day Tonight*, Bennett denied ever having met Bob Santamaria when in fact the pair had met many times. A list of charges against the ALP executive drawn up by Bennett on behalf of the Participants was the last straw. With Labor still in the wilderness, Bennett was expelled from the ALP and wrote about this in the *Nation Review* in 1967. Richard McGarvie, a Supreme Court Judge and future Victorian Governor collected

Bennett's files and clippings, using them to formulate a call by the Participants for federal intervention into the Victorian ALP. The ongoing saga was recorded in the newspapers by way of letters and opinion pieces. Geoff McDonald an ex-communist who had written about the communist influence on Aboriginal land claims became a key witness in the attack on Hartley and others as things in the ALP came to a head.

The Independent Labor Alliance was Bennett's brainchild and was created in 1969, fielding candidates in 12 electorates. The senate candidate was Ray Evans later to become confidant and speechwriter to the mining magnate, Hugh Morgan. Others included Tom Gilhooly who just happened to be on the run from the Federal Police. A former member of Australia First, Gilhooly had been a WWII POW. The list of candidates reveals the incestuous nature of politics. Reg Macey went on to become the Mayor of Port Melbourne and later still a Liberal MP. Murray Thompson was a union official and became the father-in-law of a senior Liberal Party functionary.

Leading up to the election, Bennett made hundreds of posters using Ray Evans' Carlton house as a workshop. A serial pamphleteer, Bennett plastered Melbourne with posters and was caught in the act one evening by the police at Princes Park. Atop a ladder Bennett was asked 'what are you doing up there?' later followed by 'get down or I'll put you inside.'

The amiable and kindly activist Gordon Bryant who held the inner Melbourne seat of Wills, later to become Bob Hawke's base, was roundly attacked by Bennett in a missive written by Ray Evans, for being more concerned with the people of Arnhem Land than the good electors of Wills. Bennett as the Independent Labor Alliance candidate was Bryant's challenger

and the Saturday after his attack on Bryant, Aboriginal supporters of Bryant handed out anti-Bennett fliers at most intersections throughout the electorate in a well organised counter attack.

As polling day drew closer, Bennett met with B A Santamaria at a Hawthorn monastery and sought assistance from the Democratic Labor Party and the National Civic Council in manning his polling booths. Acknowledging a common foe, the Liberal Party paid for Bennett's how-to-vote cards. The so-called Carlton 'Irish push' also chipped in to help Bennett. Dinny Ahern, Brian and Vincent Buckley, Pat Bowden, John Horwood, Geoff McDonald and others all helped hand out how to vote cards.

The election results showed that Bennett's Independent Labor Alliance didn't cause the ALP to lose seats but in some seats it got as much as 8% of the vote, including Arthur Calwell's seat of Melbourne. Calwell had led the charge in having Bennett expelled from the Labor Party. After the dust had settled, Bennett sent out a letter to all state ALP secretaries warning them that the ILA would continue fielding candidates against Labor until the Victorian Executive was removed.

His communist past firmly behind him, Bennett spoke at Melbourne, Monash and Latrobe Universities as well as RMIT, calling for Bill Hartley to be flushed out of the ALP and asking his audiences to dialogue with the DLP. At the time Bennett was unaware that his talks had in fact been organised behind the scenes by the DLP and the NCC.

The Springbok rugby riots in 1971 saw Bennett organising legal representation for most of the accused including his sparring partner Bill Hartley who at the time was no longer the secretary of the Victorian ALP.

At Peter Poynton's Carlton Club Hotel, Bennett was ejected by Poynton after an altercation, with Bennett being accused of insulting 'mine host'. Two plainclothes policemen standing outside the hotel took issue with Bennett and at Bennett's invitation they entered the terrace house next to the hotel which was occupied by a friend of Bennett's. Threatened with imminent assault, Bennett yelled out that he knew Rupert Hamer the premier. Befriended by the senior of the two police, he was taken to the Police Association Bar for drinks and was astonishingly told that his Springbok files in his Crown Solicitor's office had been read clandestinely by members of the Victorian Police Special Branch. When Bennett was given a hard time by the junior policeman he was defended by the older cop who told his subordinate - 'I'll take you down to the gym and belt the guts out of you.'

John Button later to become a federal senator was Bennett's solicitor and executor and was a partner at the Labor Law firm of Maurice Blackburn. Coincidentally on the day Russia invaded Czechoslovakia, Bennett visited Button at his workplace and had to convince him that the invasion was a reality.

Clyde Cameron who changed sides over the federal intervention issue was influenced by the resolve of Bennett's ILA to keep up the pressure on the ALP. When Cameron became a minister, Bennett appeared on TV with him, discussing the treatment of Czech dissidents. Despite Bennett's sound presentation, Cameron was able to get on top of him and wouldn't let him get a word in.

Bennett's doing over by Cameron resulted in an article by Professor Frank Knopfelmacher in *The Age* strongly defending Bennett's position. This support for Bennett led to him developing a solid

rapport with the colourful Melbourne University academic. At this stage Bennett was very pro-Israel describing himself as a 110 per cent believer in the Holocaust and a 150 per cent supporter of Israel. He wrote a series of letters to the Melbourne *Herald* and *Age* supporting the state of Israel and Jewry in general. He was somewhat taken aback however, when one day Knopfelmacher told him that 'the Jews are in all the rackets.' Bennett was perplexed by the academic's attack and wanted to ask Knopfelmacher about the suffering of the Jews during the Holocaust but he didn't want a confrontation with the man who had defended him against Clyde Cameron. Knopfelmacher later told Bill Rubenstein that he should interview Bennett for Rubenstein's book *The Left, The Right and the Jews*. Bennett's anti-communist and pro-Jewish views led to him having some friendly conversations with Bob Hawke, the great champion of Israel. Bennett also bet Hawke that the ALP would not win the 1972 federal election but Whitlam proved him wrong. Knopfelmacher continued to support Bennett and referred to him as 'a foxy lion' in *The Australian* newspaper in 1975.

Bennett continued his political stirring by supporting Andrew Richards as an independent candidate for the Melbourne City Council elections. Campaign posters put up by Bennett were in fact burnt in situ by using cigarette lighters and the candidate was not grateful. 'Keep out of my campaign' he told Bennett. The campaign had been organised out of the Poppy Shop in Lygon Street, Carlton which was then and still is owned and operated by Pat Knox.

Gareth, later to be 'Biggles' Evans was annoyed at Bennett's privateering election tactics. Evans was the then Vice President of the VCCL and the operation and profile

of the organisation affected his position in the ALP. The biographies of Labor Senators Evans and Button make mention of the activities of Bennett.

At the time of the Springbok Tour in 1971, Bennett gave a talk at LaTrobe University concerning the violence by both protestors and Police. The famous Labor Lawyer and parliamentarian John Galbally had been 'imprisoned' by students at LaTrobe about a week before Bennett's address there. Bennett took issue with the students defending Galbally's right to freedom of speech and movement which ended up as the lead story on page three of *The Age*.

In the mid 1970s Bennett defended the right of Dr Nagy to wear a uniform which included a swastika armband again on the grounds of freedom of expression. This led to spirited attacks on Bennett and the VCCL. In 1973 the dramatic raid on ASIO by Lionel Murphy the then Attorney-General under Whitlam, in connection with the alleged Fascist activities of Australian Croats made headlines and again attracted the attention of Bennett who attacked the raids. Julian Phillips on the committee of the VCCL tried hard to get Bennett to modify or withdraw his attack but his words fell on deaf ears. At this stage of his life Bennett was being the quintessential and fearless civil libertarian - defending the rights of those regardless of how their actions stood in the court of public opinion.

From 1966 to 1980, Bennett was involved in organising guest speakers at many VCCL meetings including one with Don Chipp on the topic of Film Censorship at Melbourne University in 1971 where the audience area having filled, the overflow was accommodated on chairs on stage. A 1973 Melbourne University Union House venue saw the appearance of Lionel Murphy Attorney-General as guest speaker.

Post 1980 talks by VCCL guest speakers involved David Irving – three talks, Bruce Ruxton – two talks, John Little, reforming solicitor, Geoff McDonald and Frederick Töben. McDonald an ex-communist wrote *Red Over Black*, exposing the flaws in the Aboriginal Land Rights saga while Fred Töben a schoolteacher went on to establish the Adelaide Institute, achieving a certain notoriety.

### **YOUR RIGHTS**

The most consistent feature of Bennett's role in Australian public affairs has been his publication of *Your Rights*, a layman's guide to the law which in 2006 was in its thirtieth edition. *Your Rights* advises its readers on a wide range of subjects from problems with neighbours, consumers' rights, tenants' rights, tax advice, the Police and the citizen, the motorist and the law and so on. Bennett has also used YR as a vehicle for his political and other views - some of them highly controversial.

In earlier editions of *Your Rights*, especially the 1994 edition, Bennett questioned the Holocaust which earned him worldwide condemnation from Jews and non-Jews alike. The 2006 edition canvasses opinion on multiculturalism, the Cronulla Riots, Islam, David Irving and the cartoonist Leunig.

This half A4 size handbook has been consistently sold in newsagents since its inception in 1974 and the 2006 edition retails for \$6.50. Prior to the birth of *Your Rights*, Bennett made a business proposal to Max Teichmann and a publisher that *Your Rights* be published with Bennett providing the legal content and policy matters being contributed by Alan Hughes, a political science academic at Melbourne University. Teichmann canned the idea saying that *Your Rights* would fail to attract an audience. At the time Teichmann

was a Monash University leftist academic but he has since changed direction and now writes for the conservative *News Weekly* which was created by the famous Bob Santamaria. Alan Hughes died in Melbourne in 1984 aged 48.

The first edition of *Your Rights* sold out 45,000 copies in 1974 followed by a second edition in the same year which sold almost another 25,000 copies so Teichmann's assessment proved badly off target. In its 27<sup>th</sup> year, *Your Rights* had sold 400,000 copies and Bennett had given away a further 70,000 copies. In its early years *Your Rights* attracted good reviews and large extracts from it were published in, for example, the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 25 September 1986. *Your Rights* also received good publicity in the old *Sydney Daily Mirror* as well as the Melbourne *Herald-Sun*.

Bennett's questioning of the extent of the Holocaust in editions of *Your Rights* led to a barrage of outrage and a concerted push by the Jewish lobby to put him and *Your Rights* out of business. Individual action was taken in 1984 by Melbourne Jewish lawyer Aaron Castan as well as complaints lodged by the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies with the NSW Human Rights Commission. Constant pressure was exerted on *Your Rights'* distributor Gordon & Gotch during the years 1984 – 1995 to cease distributing *Your Rights* and numerous questions were asked in state and federal parliaments. Booksellers like Angus & Robertson were also pressured not to stock *Your Rights* and suburban newsagents were approached by Jewish customers to do the same or lose their custom.

In recent times Bennett and *Your Rights* were targeted by the ABC which made a determined and aggressive effort to stop Gordon & Gotch distributing *Your Rights*. The 24<sup>th</sup> edition of *Your Rights* in 1998 contained an article by Bennett

entitled 'Your ABC – A Hoax?' wherein Bennett was critical of the treatment of Pauline Hanson by ABC host Maxine McKew as well as that of the *7.30 Report's* Kerry O'Brien.

Intimidated by the obvious threat of legal action contained in the terms of a letter from the ABC's legal department, Gordon & Gotch stated that they would cease the distribution of *Your Rights* until the dispute between Bennett and the ABC had been resolved.

Sailing close to deceptive and misleading behaviour and stupidly forgetting that it was subject to FOI, the ABC alleged that Bennett was a vexatious complainant making as many as four phone calls a day and that the Australian Broadcasting Authority refused to take his case. FOI searches vindicated Bennett's position and a minuted letter to the ABA advised that body that Bennett did not wish to waste his time pursuing the matter.

Support for Bennett came from several quarters. Terry Lane a well known ABC presenter and at the time The President of the Free Speech Committee stated that 'Bennett's views were not out of the ordinary' and that 'the large ABC thinks it can get away with squashing the small Mr Bennett.' Others who came to Bennett's defence were of the opinion that a culture of heavy handed political correctness existed in the ABC and that people like Pauline Hanson were treated with contempt by the ABC. Bennett's critics also claimed that *Your Rights* was not a legitimate publication despite the fact that Sir James Darling, a former ABC Chairman and member of Bennett's ACLU for many years had described *Your Rights* in 1987 as 'a valuable even a necessary watchdog for the preservation of our type of democratic society.'

Murdoch journos Michael Duffy and Michael Barnard weighed in behind Bennett with a vengeance with Duffy headlining 'Crushing Foes as easy as ABC' while Barnard's piece was headed 'Open Debate off the air at ABC.' Matters just got worse for the ABC with several ABC broadcasters expressing amazement at the way Bennett and *Your Rights* were being treated. Playing hard ball, Bennett forged on and mailed *Your Rights* out to all Federal MPs with a covering letter indicating that he was going to circularise all State MPs. Shortly after this the ABC gave up and caved in, advising Gordon & Gotch that it did not intend to take further action in relation to *Your Rights* and that it had never really threatened to take legal action. The ABC's humiliation was not reported in its lickspittle print media mates' papers the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* but it was in *The Australian*, *The Courier Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Herald-Sun*. One may well ask Maxine McKew who left the ABC to challenge John Howard in Bennelong in 2007 where she stands on the issue of free speech?

#### YOUR RIGHTS & HOLOCAUST

Bennett's progress, from communist and true believer in the Holocaust and supporter of Israel to Holocaust denier and Hanson supporter, was a bumpy ride involving as it did a battle with the bottle and allegations of mental instability. As Bennett describes it – 'A funny thing happened on the way to the Holocaust.'

A 110 per cent believer in the official version of the Holocaust, Bennett tore up a Children of God pamphlet handed to him as he walked along Collins Street Melbourne in the late 1970s because he regarded that group as being anti-semitic. Bennett's pro-Israel stance was such that Frank Knopfelmacher suggested that Jewish activist Bill Rubenstein

interview him. Bennett remembers the hair on the back of his neck bristling when he saw a German lawyer on TV saying that perhaps there had been no gas chambers and he nearly had a falling out with a girlfriend when she suggested that he read some League of Rights books. Bennett angrily told her not to talk like that. Her brother had written a revisionist book *The Victims*. While she was overseas for four weeks in 1979 Bennett saw a reference to a book in the Melbourne University magazine *Farrago* entitled *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century* written by a Professor 'Bitz' and advertised for sale at the League of Rights bookshop in Melbourne. With some trepidation Bennett visited the League of Rights Bookshop and purchased a copy of the book from a mild mannered Jim Marsh. He quickly realised that the author's name was in fact 'Butz', indicating sloppy review work by *Farrago*.

According to Bennett, reading *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century* provided him with the 'greatest shock of my life.' Butz declared that there was no contemporaneous documentary evidence of six million Jews killed in the camps, of gas chambers or of a specific plan to exterminate Jews. Now seriously confused and alarmed, Bennett wrote off to the Jewish Board of Deputies asking for a refutation of Butz's claims. Three months lapsed before Bennett received a publication from the Board entitled *Six Million Jews did die* but Butz was given only fleeting mention in a footnote. Now increasingly suspicious, Bennett fired off a letter to *The Age* pleading the case for the Palestinian cause and mentioning Butz. A flurry of letters to the editor resulted in an article by Frank Knopfelmacher entitled 'Body Blow to Jewry.' As a result of the interest generated, Bennett found himself being interviewed on ABC

TV as well as the commercial channels 7 and 9. It was at this point that Bennett crossed the line – from being a fervent and committed left-wing supporter of Israel and believer in the Holocaust to the direct opposite. This transition was to define Bennett's life to the present day.

Alan Hughes, the Melbourne University political scientist and friend of Bennett's was also a leading light of the VCCL. As committed as Bennett had once been on the Israel/Holocaust issue, Alan Hughes began to be pressured to remove Bennett from the VCCL. Bennett's slowly developing crusade started causing rifts amongst once friends and colleagues. Alan Hughes was at his then girlfriend's house one evening watching TV when Bennett suddenly appeared on screen. 'You're just a Nazi' yelled the girlfriend's father at Hughes, aware that Hughes and Bennett were friends and members of the VCCL. Hughes did his best to get Bennett back on track by bringing many books to Bennett's house – all supporting the Holocaust. Hughes was a proficient German speaker and had visited Germany many times giving lectures on the Holocaust and his only published book was dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust.

Bennett continued to burn more personal bridges when he sent a summary of his views to friends Talis Polis, a lecturer at LaTrobe University, Merran Evans, the wife of 'Biggles' Evans and Colin Howard, a lecturer in Law at Melbourne University. Colin Howard returned Butz's book to Bennett inscribed with 'no thank you' in red biro on the front cover while Polis leaked Bennett's handwritten memo to the then *National Times*. Still seeking to turn Bennett back, Alan Hughes claimed that Bennett had written on his circulated summary 'these are only my



tentative views' – but according to Bennett this was simply not so, with Hughes still expecting Bennett to recant.

Bennett's questioning of the Holocaust sparked a flurry of articles and letters to the editors and in the UK the *New Statesman* ran a piece entitled 'The Two Faces of John Bennett.' At home, Jewish activist Bill Rubenstein wrote an article for the conservative magazine *Quadrant* devoted to the 'Bennett affair' and gave Bennett a page in his book *The Jews in Australia*. Bennett alleges a lot of criticism of him at the time was hysterical and riddled with errors. Bennett had obviously become Rubenstein's *bete noire* with the Jewish Professor describing him as 'an unpleasant eccentric', 'a squalid nuisance', 'a lone wolf malcontent', 'a freak of nature', and 'possibly more evil than Himmler and Pol Pot.' For good measure the millionaire commentator Phillip Adams said he hoped the CSIRO could find a cure for Bennett's dissident thoughts.

An alarmed VCCL committee now very concerned about the publicity Bennett was attracting convened an emergency meeting resulting in a letter from Alan Hughes to *The Age* declaring that the committee was unanimous in its condemnation of Bennett.

As the saga continued, it seemed to have an unsettling effect on the letters to the editor sections of *The Age* and *Herald*. *The Age* published a letter from Bennett in his capacity as VCCL Secretary on the subject of uranium mining and then ten days later published the same letter again. A letter from Bennett to the *Herald* as a private citizen had its sentence sequence hopelessly muddled up by the Herald but this didn't stop Alan Hughes phoning Bennett and telling him that the *Herald* letter was the last straw and that an extraordinary meeting of the VCCL committee was essential

in order to resolve 'the Bennett problem.' Hughes was now under mounting pressure from the media, VCCL Jews such as Aaron Castan and interstate civil liberties groups. Hughes was a person who became agitated easily and was addicted to a cocktail of upper and downer prescription drugs.

Bennett agreed to Hughes' request but said the matter could be dealt with at VCCL's AGM due in March 1980. As Secretary, Bennett did the lion's share of work at the VCCL and interestingly was the only person with a copy of the constitution and the membership list. The AGM was scheduled to be held at Bennett's house at Canning Street, Carlton but Hughes gazumped Bennett by calling a VCCL meeting three days earlier at Melbourne University. At this meeting 'Biggles' Evans quite courageously kept nominating Bennett to remain on the VCCL committee.

The period 1980-1984 was one of comical confusion with Monty Pythonesque overtones as the Hughes and Bennett groups squared off with each other as to who rightfully controlled the VCCL. In 1981 the Hughes group served a writ on Bennett asserting they were the 'real' VCCL but nothing came of this after Bennett lodged a defence. Bennett tried to attend the AGM of the Hughes group in 1982 but was denied entry, being told he had been expelled despite receiving no notice of any charges or being notified of a hearing. In 1984 he made a VCCL submission to Justice Hope re ASIO with forty journalists attending when Alan Hughes burst into the meeting some four hours after the commencement of proceedings and dramatically handed a note to Justice Hope. *The Age* and *Sun* newspapers reported the incident, making special mention of Bennett's standard uniform of Mao cap and heavy overcoat.

Becoming increasingly exasperated, the Hughes group adopted different tactics by trying to incorporate themselves as VCCL but again they were stalemated by Bennett. David Greason who was writing for the *Australian Jewish News* contacted Bennett and advised that he had been approached by the Hughes group to be a signatory for the purposes of incorporation.

Strangely, given the identity of his employer, Greason amazingly confided to Bennett that he was largely in agreement with him on the Holocaust question. Bennett approached Jan Wade, the then Victorian Attorney-General and given the facts, she was able to intervene to stop the incorporation of the Hughes group.

Alan Hughes finally broke through in his duel with Bennett when Jim Kennan became the Victorian Labor government's Attorney-General and directed Corporate Affairs to incorporate the Hughes group. Bennett still believes that Kennan was totally out of order in this matter and at the time he fired off a letter to the *Herald* alleging Kennan's conflict of interest given that he was a member of the Hughes group. The letter was only run in the first edition raising the possibility that the paper was wary of a possible libel action.

Flushed with victory over Bennett after the Kennan decision, Hughes now came out saying that Bennett had in fact been expelled from the VCCL but again there was no formalisation or documentation – no charges, no date of hearing and no date of expulsion.

To insure against losing his position on the VCCL, as well as the name, Bennett had organised a fallback position by setting up Australian Civil Liberties Union –ACLU – in 1980 to be run in tandem with the VCCL and this strategy ended up paying off. The 1984 edition of *Your Rights* contained the first

reference to the holocaust – one brief paragraph of the revisionist view of the Holocaust. The reaction was hysterical with George Hampel, a Melbourne Jewish QC later to become a judge, spitting at Bennett in the street. Hampel's wife Felicity would later become president of Liberty Victoria, an NGO, formerly known as the Victorian Council for Civil Liberties.

Another Jewish QC Alan Goldberg said it was a pity that Bennett couldn't be sacked by the Victorian Legal Aid Commission and at the other end of the scale, the Jewish owner of a sandwich shop refused to serve Bennett and told him not to visit his shop again. If these sanctions had been enacted they would have been clearly contrary to any anti-discrimination legislation. On another occasion when Bennett was standing outside Her Majesty's Theatre after a performance, a man spat a mouthful of beer into Bennett's face and when outside the Melbourne Town Hall during a Holocaust Exhibition being held there, Bennett was assaulted by being hit on the back of the head. The attacks on Bennett by incensed Jews continued at his place of work, the Victorian Legal Aid Commission. Two cartons of *Your Rights* stored in Bennett's office were clearly stamped 'this is racist material' and he was sure that Jewish members of staff had to be the culprits. Senior members of the Commission requested that he delete all references to the Commission as being his employer in editions of *Your Rights* but Bennett stood his ground and refused. As retribution, the Commission ceased to allow Bennett to distribute free copies of *Your Rights* from the front reception counter at Legal Aid – something he had done for six years.

Aaron Castan QC served a Federal Court writ under the Trade Practices Act on Bennett, claiming

that reviewers did not endorse *Your Rights* 1984. Castan was represented by another Jewish lawyer Alan Goldberg. Peter Buchanan later to become a Supreme Court judge appeared for Bennett. The action was based on the reaction by several reviewers of pre-1984 editions of *Your Rights* who said they did not endorse the content of the 1984 edition and demanded that their reviews be deleted. These people included Gareth Evans and Yvonne Preston, a writer for the *National Times*. Bennett agreed to their demands and deleted the reviews in question - for to do otherwise and battle on in court would have had him slugged with a huge bill for costs. Relatively unfazed by this latest episode in what had become a concerted assault on *Your Rights* and Bennett, he organized an impressive list of new reviewers which included Sir James Darling, ex-principal of Geelong Grammar and Former Chairman of the ABC, Joyce Steele OBE, former Minister for Education in South Australia and Lady Phylis D. Cilento, well known author and champion of Vitamin E. A blunder by a too trusting Bennett resulted in the tempo of the attacks on him being notched up when he sent a copy of the reviews to be included in a reprint of the 1984 *Your Rights* to one Brian Stonier who promptly passed the information on.

Once the identity of the new reviewers became known, Bennett's enemies charged in again. Sir James Darling received a visit from a Rabbi asking him to withdraw his review and was under the same pressure from his wife! All the new reviewers received a range of abusive and threatening letters but despite all the flak, most of them stuck to their guns and supported Bennett. At one stage *Your Rights* received good reviews from broadcasters Muriel Cooper of 3AW and Doug Aiton but Bennett was

later phoned by Cooper's producer who requested that Cooper's review be deleted.

It was later revealed that Cooper and Aiton had been contacted by Aaron Castan and asked to withdraw their reviews. Bennett realised that pressure was being brought to bear on other journalists not to quote him when after spending three hours with an *Age* reporter on a Friday discussing the rights of officials to enter houses, the published article on the Saturday made no mention of Bennett's input but quoted other sources. The same thing happened to a *Sunday Herald Sun* article on cameras installed on freeways when Bennett was taken on site and photographed. Again there was no mention of Bennett but there was a photo of a spokesman for the VCCL, the rival of Bennett's ACLU. According to David Greason, he had been told by *The Age's* editor that journalists were instructed not to deal with Bennett. Radio station 3AW cancelled Bennett's interview with Doug Aiton twice. Aaron Castan's next move was to write to Gordon & Gotch, the distributor of *Your Rights*, outlining his complaints, and they agreed not to distribute the reprinted 1984 edition of *Your Rights* which resulted in Bennett finding different distributors in each state in the period 1984-1995.

In 1995 Bennett resumed his relationship with Gordon & Gotch which remains to this day with *Your Rights* being more widely distributed than ever. Gordon & Gotch never took issue with Bennett on his politics and the contents of *Your Rights* – they simply didn't want to become enmeshed in expensive legal actions. Most editions of *Your Rights* since 1984 have contained references to censorship, revisionism and other references to censorship of the debate on immigration and multiculturalism.

Complimentary reviews of *Your Rights* from 1985 to the present time still cover the outside rear cover.

Bennett's enemies remained committed to their destruction of him and *Your Rights*. The Victorian Law Institute *Journal* found itself in hot water when it said of the 1999 edition of *Your Rights*, 'Your Rights 1999 is an extraordinary publication – a must have for just about everyone.' Pressured to apologise to a Jewish lobby group, the Institute was ridiculed by Richard Ackland the presenter of the ABC's *Media Watch* 1998-99 for buckling and pressuring Bennett not to use their favourable review.

Bennett has sent *Your Rights* to most Australian public libraries as well as sending it to Federal and State MPs, particularly the 2000 edition which focused on the GST. Most editions have contained sections on 'Free Speech' and 'Big Brother'. The 2001 edition broke from tradition, featuring a garish pink cover advertising a new section on homosexual issues which attracted some raised eyebrows from Bennett's more socially conservative supporters and some attacks from left wing homosexuals who thought it incongruous to have a person they considered a Nazi defending their rights and values.

Bennett knew exactly where he stood with the very well financed and organised Jewish Lobby who were out to destroy his ACLU and *Your Rights* but the reaction of many of his friends and acquaintances was interesting. Peter Blazey the outrageous homosexual who died of AIDS and once worked for Andrew Peacock bared all with his book *Screw Loose*. No stranger at incurring public outrage, Blazey whispered sotto voce to Bennett in a restaurant that he agreed with Bennett's views. A very prominent TV interviewer at the time used the same technique when he whispered

his support to Bennett at the end of an interview. One ex-girlfriend of Bennett's cut him dead in Lygon Street, Carlton, while another one then married to a mutual friend screamed that she didn't want him in their Fitzroy house. There were lots of death threats and abusive letters with most of them being anonymous. A Mr Bailey, the head of the Human Rights Commission returned a copy of *Your Rights* because it had one paragraph querying the Holocaust.

Most of Bennett's friends and acquaintances – many of whom have known him from Melbourne University days have stood by him – not because they are avid students of the Holocaust and revisionism but because they genuinely enjoy his quirky and sometimes bizarre eccentricity, decidedly at odds with the humdrum lives most of them now lead.

Over a period of time, Bennett had several protracted conversations and exchanges of correspondence with B.A Santamaria whom he had got to know well when Bennett had been expelled from the ALP and had been involved with the formation of the Independent Labor Alliance. At first Santamaria found the Butz argument persuasive and he indicated this in his first letter to Bennett but his later correspondence stated that he preferred to accept eye witness testimony that the generally accepted version of the Holocaust was true. Bennett also had several conversations with the famous historian Professor Geoffrey Blainey and sent him a lot of material. A polite listener, Blainey asked several interesting questions of Bennett but failed to be convinced by his arguments and later accepted the 'official version' of the Holocaust in his *Brief History of the World*. Blainey was one of the very few prominent historians who replied to Bennett's letters and

later played a part in preventing Melbourne University – Bennett's alma mater – from backing away from a decision to allow the controversial David Irving to give a public lecture at the university in 1978. Blainey later had lunch with Bennett and Irving at a café in Grattan Street, Carlton. Sir Walter Crocker, Lieutenant Governor of South Australia, 1973-82, was supportive and later gave a review for the controversial 1984 edition of *Your Rights* which was the spark that lit the fuse. Bennett's former headmaster Sir James Darling also provided a favourable review despite rejecting Bennett's views about the Holocaust and he even joined the ACLU. Dr Darling was clearly a 'pure' civil libertarian and was quite unfazed by the approaches to him by the Jewish Lobby to deny Bennett.

Bennett describes Darling's ACLU subscription renewals accompanied by 'headmaster to student' comments. In 1953 Darling observed the details of a letter Bennett was writing to his father in the Geelong Grammar library wherein the school was described as 'appalling'. Making no comment the famous principal walked away. A year earlier he had said 'hello' to Bennett as he was doing his school rounds and was furious when he was ignored. Rounding on Bennett, Dr Darling told him, 'when I say 'hello', you will reply'.

The Holocaust is like no other subject. For many people like Philip Adams it is a religion and is the only aspect of history which in many countries is protected by criminal sanctions against those who challenge the official orthodoxy.

Bennett's supporters point out that during all his many exchanges with his critics and detractors, he has never used or advocated violence nor has he used abuse and invective against his detractors. On the other hand Bennett has had his

right to employment and free enterprise challenged, been threatened, assaulted, abused in the most vicious way, vilified and had his car sabotaged.

Bennett's interaction with certain individuals is interesting. In his pre-revisionist period Bennett was a close friend of Gareth Evans and his then wife Merran, often visiting the pair at their home in North Carlton and later at their Ivanhoe residence. It was Evans who arranged for the infamous Whitlam Attorney-General Lionel Murphy to address the VCCL in 1974 – a year before the Dismissal. Evans was also amused by a spoof on the ALP written by Bennett and published in *The Australian*. He voiced his concern however when the *Sun* newspaper said that Bennett was using the VCCL office in Carlton as a telephone contact point in relation to Andrew Richards, an independent candidate standing against the ALP in Melbourne City Council elections. When Bennett first expressed his doubts about the Holocaust, Gareth Evans was quoted in *The Age* saying Bennett didn't have an anti-semitic bone in his body and when Bennett was defending himself against the Hughes group at a VCCL AGM in Melbourne, Evans kept nominating Bennett for every committee position when nominations were called for. Bennett's girlfriend at the time was present at this meeting. As a senior ALP Senator, Evans was beginning to feel compromised by his friendship with Bennett and on one occasion attacked him in the Senate no doubt wishing to have his position placed on record for the benefit of his colleagues and the Labor Government. Notwithstanding this he arranged for Bennett to attend a conference in the old Parliament House Canberra dealing with the proposed National Crimes Commission. Speaking for ten minutes against the establishment

of such an organisation, earned Bennett the quip from Evans – 'every Punch must have its Judy'. Evans had to pay a price for sponsoring Bennett as he was attacked in the Senate by Liberal Senator Don Chipp on the grounds of Bennett's querying of the Holocaust. During Evans' time as Attorney General, Bennett kept the lines of communication open by sending over ten law reform submissions to his office. Merran Evans who had received a Butz book from Bennett moved a motion at the VCCL Brian Fitzpatrick Memorial dinner in 1984 congratulating him on his work as VCCL Secretary for the period 1966-1980 which was greeted with substantial applause. Bennett claims that Brian Fitzpatrick, an historian and long dead has been credited by his enemies as having founded the VCCL. Bennett quaintly describes this as 'trying to write me out of history'.

A letter from Bennett as President of the ACLU was published in the Melbourne *Age* on 10 December 1996 stating that the VCCL was founded by Ian Turner, Beatrice Faust and Bennett at a public meeting in Melbourne on April 19, 1966. The letter further stated that the founders were members of the New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties and the main speaker was Mr St. John QC of the NSWCCCL. Bennett was noted as secretary of the VCCL from 1966 to 1980 and the writer of all its newsletters. The VCCL was an offshoot of the NSWCCCL and was not a continuation of the Council for Civil Liberties founded by Brian Fitzpatrick in 1936. No mention was made of Mr Fitzpatrick's CCL at the meeting at which the VCCL was established and it was not mentioned in VCCL newsletters until 1978 when a biography of Brian Fitzpatrick written by Don Watson, later to be Paul Keating's

speechwriter, was published. In his letter, Bennett stressed that the VCCL was not mentioned in the Watson biography, nor was it mentioned anywhere in the print media before 1966 simply because prior to that date it did not exist. *The Age*, of 23 November 1996, referred to a meeting celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the VCCL, claiming that the VCCL was in fact founded in 1936. Bennett, with the facts clearly on his side claimed that this was a blatant attempt to rewrite history. Bennett also used his letter to refute his labelling as 'the leader of the Holocaust denial movement in Australia' – *The Age* 9 November 1996. He stated that he had never 'denied' the Holocaust took place. Bennett referred to correspondence with the VCCL failing to refute his claim that the VCCL was in fact founded in 1966 but continuing to assert in subsequent publications that 1936 was its year of birth. Bennett has called for this patently false claim to cease once and for all.

Given Bennett's turbulent times, his eccentricities and more importantly his powerful enemies, Gareth and Merran Evans demonstrated substantial courage in maintaining their contact with him. The Evans have gone their separate ways but Bennett had a coffee with Merran in 2004 and met Evans by chance in Carlton in 2005.

Alan Hughes had been a very close friend until Bennett began querying the Holocaust. Prior to that the two shared left wing views and an unrelenting support of Israel and the historical correctness of the Holocaust. Hughes had boarded at Melbourne University's International House with me and we had a common interest in horseracing with Hughes even devising a betting system known as Form Plan. I told Bennett about Hughes' pill popping which was impressive and widely known on campus. The possibility of Hughes

being a homosexual was also canvassed despite Hughes fathering a son years later.

Hughes was not a physically strong person. Small in stature and of pasty white complexion he often became quite emotional when arguing with Bennett over the latter's revisionist views. He once arrived at Bennett's house with fifteen different books all running the orthodox pro-Holocaust line and was quite taken aback when Bennett said he had read the lot. He was under a lot of pressure from university sources and personal friends to disown Bennett and seek his dismissal from the VCCL.

Hughes, absolutely dismayed by Bennett's intransigence and frantically eager to appease the Jewish members of the VCCL was prepared to bend the rules to get rid of Bennett at any price. At a VCCL meeting called by Hughes and his group he had previously declared that membership was closed but then permitted thirty-two new members to join – apparently in an attempt to stack the membership against Bennett. Only forty-eight years of age, Hughes died suddenly in Melbourne shortly before Aaron Caston and his group finally incorporated the VCCL. It was assumed by a lot of people close to Hughes that his heavy addiction to prescription drugs contributed to his untimely death in 1984.

All the presidents of VCCL from 1984 to 1998 were Jews – mainly from the legal profession. Aaron Caston, Alan Goldberg, June Factor a writer of children's books, Ron Merkel and Robert Richter all did their time at the helm. A non-Jew Judy Wallace did a term as did Felicity Hampel, married to Jewish QC George Hampel. A majority or near majority of the VCCL executive and committee for these years were Jewish but they did speak out against Race Vilification Legislation and War Crime Trials

and were generally active in promoting civil liberties. The Jewish Lobby, however, was to support the Bracks' Government in finally passing Race Vilification laws that backfired badly against Christians in particular when Muslim groups exploited the situation. In 2006 Julian Burnside QC became president of Liberty Victoria that had replaced the VCCL.

A non-smoker and reformed alcoholic for more than thirty years, Bennett has always carried a prodigious work load. Always in a honorary position, he was Secretary of the VCCL for fourteen years and President of the ACLU for twenty-four years as at 2007. His home phone number has been listed for civil liberty queries for thirty-six years. During his time working at Victorian Legal Aid Commission, phone queries were redirected to his work number. It was Bennett who wrote almost all the law reform proposals for the VCCL and ACLU as well as writing their newsletters and dealing with almost all the queries in relation to individual cases which involved dealing with a substantial number of concerned and troubled people. He published six pamphlets with a combined circulation of almost one million copies and arranged for the publication of lengthy extracts from *Your Rights* in the Melbourne *Herald*, *Sydney Daily Mirror* - now *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. *Your Rights* has been published in Greek, Italian and Vietnamese.

#### **ODDBALL BEHAVIOUR**

Bennett's eccentricity had its roots back in his Geelong Grammar and Melbourne University days. Over the years he has not diminished the reputation he has for being outlandish and controversial and plenty of 'Bennett' stories are out there.

In 1966 Bennett had stayed with Peter Blazey at his parents' home at Portsea. With others he walked

along the foreshore to Cheviot Beach where Harold Holt was to drown a week later. Bennett thought the he was only going for a short stroll but the group changed its mind and kept walking to the nearby heads then headed off to the beach on the bay at Portsea. Bennett was wearing a new herringbone suit. A barbed wire fence built out into the sea to keep people out of the naval reserve confronted the beach walkers forcing Bennett to walk into the sea up to his chest and then back onto the crowded beach where his suited and dripping wet appearance did not escape notice.

On another occasion Bennett was invited by Beatrice Faust, a co-convenor of the VCCL to meet her at the ABC TV studios at Ripponlea, Melbourne where an abortionist was to be interviewed. Bennett had just written a pamphlet entitled 'Abortion Law Reform' so he was well up to speed. At the last moment the abortionist chickened out fearing his voice would identify him, leading to his prosecution under the laws at that time, despite him being filmed with his back to the camera and in semi-darkness. The rattled producers then asked Bennett to stand in for the abortionist with his back to the camera and in poor light, which he did with considerable flair. Next morning he was phoned by Labor's John Button who said 'that was you on ABC TV last night'. Apparently Bennett's identifiable phoney nasal drawl would preclude him from making nuisance phone calls! Bennett says that his oddball behaviour in walking fully suited into the sea and impersonating an abortionist may be traceable to his years at Geelong Grammar where he was conditioned not to worry about what other people thought of him.

Another visit to Ripponlea saw Bennett involved in a protest in favour of the ABC's development of

the historic site. On Bennett interjecting, an opposing demonstrator yelled at Bennett, 'get back to the country you came from', prompting Beatrice Faust to advise the assemblage that Bennett was indeed Australian born of Scottish extraction. Bennett's swarthinness has prompted past comment and he muses that maybe Moorish seamen who were wrecked on the Scottish coast when the Spanish Armada went down, contributed to his complexion. Bennett has also been mistaken for an Italian in Carlton and a Jew in St Kilda. One wag suggested to Bennett that he should take the part of Shylock.

In 1979 a letter writer to *The Age* stated that it was a pity that Bennett with his 'non-Aryan' looks had not been gassed at Auschwitz instead of a blond blue eyed youth. The writer of this somewhat confusing letter declared that he had in fact witnessed gassings. Feelings were running pretty high at the time and just about any insult or slur that could be thrown about was, particularly by the commentariat of the day which included Philip Adams and Derryn Hinch. Adams and Hinch were merciless in their abuse of Bennett. George Orwell said that 'anyone who challenges the prevailing orthodoxy finds himself being silenced with surprising effectiveness. A genuinely unfashionable opinion is almost never given a fair hearing.' In Australia, dissident thinkers who challenge the accepted version of the past can expect no quarter. Bennett has been attacked in *Quadrant* and *New Statesman* as well as all the usual media outlets. He was even written into a play *The Diary of Anne Frank – a Forgery?* – written by a Sydney Jew.

Bennett is described as a vicious and evil neo-Nazi professional propagandist who poses as civil libertarian and is utterly

discredited. Such attacks do not allow for a right of reply. Gerard Henderson launched into Bennett in *The Australian* in 1989 entitled 'It's Time to Muzzle Lunar Rights Baying.' The Sydney Morning Herald savaged Bennett again in 1989 with a piece entitled 'Lies, Damned Lies and Hogwash.' Bennett's appeal to the Press Council over the SMH's refusal to publish his response was predictably refused. Philip Adams the multimillionaire skeptic and atheist accused Bennett of spewing hate since the 1930s and has branded Holocaust deniers as 'blasphemers.' Given Adams journalistic background it is interesting that Bennett was born in 1936 and did not become a Revisionist until 1979.

Some anti-Zionist Jews have defended the freedom of speech for Revisionists and the Jewish writer J G Burg who was a Holocaust survivor, has denied that gassing took place at Auschwitz. Other Jewish historians such as Arno Mayer agree with Revisionists that the extent of the Holocaust has been exaggerated.

In 1990 the *Sunday Age* published three feature pieces targeting Bennett entitled 'The Right to Be a Racist', 'Package Poison with an Inbuilt Antidote' and 'Cloaking Hate with Freedom's Mantle'. The three pieces took up 100 column inches in total and allowed Bennett six column inches in reply. 'Pathological ravings', 'unhinged', 'evil' and 'poisonous' were used in the articles and letters to the editor. 'Freedom of the Press' has come to mean just that – the freedom for press proprietors and editors to indulge in character assassination and deny the opportunity for any reply. According to Professor W Rubinstein, the Holocaust has become the number one propaganda weapon for Israel and in 2007 the battle still rages

between the combatants on either side.

On the other hand Bennett describes himself as a Bismarckian paternalist who sometimes signs his letters and emails as 'Otto' or 'Bismarck.' Tongue in cheek, Bennett also alludes to his Buddhism and has possibly immunised himself against depression and other problems by simply not taking himself too seriously.

He has also been interested in supporting people holding controversial minority opinions ever since his Geelong Grammar and Melbourne University days when he was a self-proclaimed communist. He had joined the NSW CCL in the early 1960s until that organisation suggested to their Victorian members that they set up their own body. As a result, Ian Turner, an ex-Communist and Monash University lecturer, Bennett and Beatrice Faust, a prominent feminist called a public meeting and founded the VCCL in 1966. Bennett was elected Secretary and held the position until he was expelled in 1980. Ian Turner was the assistant secretary until he was replaced in 1967 by Peter Blazey.

Over the years Bennett has had a love/hate relationship with the Victorian Police involving as it did, giving talks to police groups including one large meeting of about two hundred police at Russell Street Headquarters. At the other end of the scale Bennett defended many of the demonstrators at Olympic Park, Melbourne during the Springbok Tour where police brutality was alleged. Bennett received another spate of death threats during these times and Police scrutinised his diaries at his office at the Deputy Crown Solicitor's office in Melbourne. In his role as Devil's Advocate and his high on four decades of activism with the VCCL and ACLU, Bennett has made numerous representations on policy issues



affecting the police and handled hundreds of complaints by citizens against them. As head of the civil law grants section at the Legal Aid Commission, he made grants of aid in relation to alleged police abuse of power at the Richmond Secondary College but on the other hand Bennett has attacked those demonstrators who impede the free movement of others and prevent people entering their places of employment.

In 1964 Bennett bought a new suit at Myers and organised for his old suit to be mailed back to him. Leaving the store with the tag still attached to the suit, Bennett was arrested in Bourke Street by a store detective, the tag clearly flapping in sight on Bennett's back. Escorted back to the suit department, it was soon established that all was above board and Bennett departed Myers again with what he called a 'weak' apology.

In 1972 at his Pigdon Street Carlton address, police arrived with a search warrant looking for a 'John Bennett', drug dealer. After a search revealed no drugs, the police departed and later at the Carlton Cinema while in the process of telling a friend about the raid, the friend pointed at the other 'John Bennett' in the crowd. Reporting the matter to the police, Bennett was able to have his statement destroyed and left with apologies.

The 1969 election saw Bennett putting up posters on a tree in Melbourne's Princes Park, the home of the famous Carlton AFL Club. Close to midnight he was sprung by a cruising police car, the driver telling him, 'get down or we'll put you inside'.

In the same year standing on a ladder, he put up posters on a lamp post outside Pentridge Prison under the watchful eye of an armed guard in his tower.

In 1970 Peter Steedman the editor of Monash University's *Lots Wife* magazine and later to become a more than colourful federal Labor MP, published an extract of a piece by Bennett on police powers without permission and highlighted the article with a cartoon depicting police as 'pigs'. Bennett's explanation to the Police Association that he was not connected with the offensive cartoon was accepted.

#### **ALCOHOL AND CARS**

Concerned by Bennett's erratic behaviour, a girlfriend suggested he visit her psychiatrist. Bennett did so but decided that the 'shrink' was the one who needed counselling! That was the first and last time he consulted with a psychiatrist despite the unfounded allegations in a Jewish dossier that he had been an inmate at the Mont Park Lunatic Asylum in the late 1960s.

Alcohol has played its part in Bennett's life travel. His destructive affair with the demon drink began in his second year at Melbourne University and he was drinking to excess right into the late 1960s. Copping out somewhat, Bennett attributes a lot of his drinking to the stresses of his battles with the ALP, The Springbok Tour and the Jenkinson inquiry into Pentridge Prison which was instigated largely through the efforts of Ed Flannery, a member of the VCCL executive, criminal lawyer and brother of the notorious 'hitman' Chris Flannery. Two serious car accidents in 1973 in which thankfully nobody was injured was some sort of wake up call for Bennett who was by now a serious alcoholic. He had been so drunk that he simply couldn't remember either accident! Later when Bennett had finally kicked the killer habit he was stopped by police about a week after going on the wagon and breath tested. They were a week too late!

The trigger for Bennett's ultimate abstinence was most probably his first attendance at an AA meeting with the ex-wife of a well known Australian painter. A few months before she took Bennett to AA this woman summonsed Bennett to her house where in a fit of rage she accused him of being unfaithful to her, tried to knee him in the balls, tipped a glass of beer over his head, ripped his jacket and then ran out into the street screaming 'rape, rape'. An alert bystander managed to grab Bennett's arm but the once first grade forward pocket player broke free and beat a hasty retreat before reinforcements arrived. Sometime after this episode the troubled woman tried to run another boyfriend down. As most alcoholics do, Bennett had his moments of denial but finally realised that total abstinence was the only solution. He has not had a drink since 1974.

Bennett's affair with the motor car was somewhat akin to his joust with alcohol. Starting with the accident in my Chrysler in Central Australia, he went on to own five old 'bombs' in the 1960s. He bought a Torana in 1972 and had two serious accidents in that vehicle. In 1994 he bought another 1972 Torana and hand painted it white three times, so badly that his efforts attracted amused comment. Driving to the Brighton Baths one day a smart BMW pulled up alongside him, the driver humourously saying 'I see you have painted your car'. Bennett responded by saying he was an artist.

In 1998 the two front wheels of the Torana fell off at different times, luckily when Bennett was driving slowly. His well known Carlton mechanic told him there was no doubt the car had been sabotaged. On another occasion Bennett was driving near the Doncaster Shoppingtown in traffic when his car was pushed into the one in

front of him. A frenzied male passenger from that car jumped on Bennett's bonnet and kicked in his windscreen before assaulting the driver behind Bennett by kicking and punching him to the ground. It transpired that the assailant was a passenger in his parents' car and was out on day release from a drug clinic. The distraught parents told Bennett that two weeks previously their son had done \$10,000 worth of damage to their home by taking to it with an axe!

Several of Bennett's friends refused to drive with him as they considered the Torana a death trap. In 2001 a mechanically minded and car wise friend of Bennett asked Bennett to stop and let him out of the car, convinced the Torana was about to disintegrate. Bennett was persuaded there and then to visit a second-hand car yard where he bought a 1994 Seca in good condition. This particular friend's life has slowly and sadly disintegrated over the past 15 years having spent a lot of time in and out of mental homes. Notwithstanding this he is a computer nerd and once showed Bennett a printout of telephone numbers phone tapped by ASIO. Bennett's number was on the list.

Another of Bennett's offbeat friends had no formal education but has a brilliant mind and an encyclopaedic memory as well as being one of Melbourne's most prolific and efficient shoplifters.

Bennett's habit of constantly talking tongue in cheek confuses not only his listeners but according to him, sometimes he wonders if he is being serious or not. He attributes his driving of old and unsafe cars, his wearing of op shop clothes and shoes and the shambles that is his Carlton house to his Scottish miserliness – all of which prompted Pauline Hanson to say when she met him, 'He's very strange'.

## PEREGRINATIONS

Bennett's only self-indulgence is his annual overseas trips when he leaves Melbourne on the first day of winter and returns one week before the AFL Grand Final where he sits in the members' stand at the MCG. In contrast with his personal meagreness it is not widely known that over the years Bennett has generously given cash to a number of individuals and various causes. In 2001 alone he distributed more than \$20,000. In recent times Bennett discovered that one of his recipients died leaving \$500,000 in cash!

Bennett's globetrotting had its roots in 1979 when he went to Los Angeles to deliver papers at a Historical Revisionist conference. At that stage he thought that travel was just a waste of money. In 1987 he was offered a trip to Libya by Robert Pash of the Libyan Cultural Centre in Melbourne where he attended various forums and spoke himself on the subject of racism. Many audience members were African who rankled when Bennett spoke about black tribal racism and genocide on the African Continent. As well he spoke about the anti-white racism demonstrated by Asian nations like Japan and China.

Having done what he had to do in Libya, Bennett flew from Tripoli to Frankfurt and started touring, staying in YMCA and backpacker hostels. One can imagine the response of some of the younger residents when a much older Bennett arrived in a dormitory late at night in his obviously second-hand clothes with barely any luggage. Well and truly bitten by the travel bug, Bennett has travelled extensively, mainly through Europe since 1987. Escaping from Melbourne's three month winter he has stayed in more than one hundred and fifty cities in Europe and in many cities has stayed in up to ten different

locations in for example London and Berlin. Using mainly a EuroRail pass and as little as eight kilograms of luggage, Bennett has found that he can travel in a very mobile and timesaving way. Travelling this way since 9/11 can have its downside however, with Bennett on occasions being viewed suspiciously by airport security and subjected to embarrassing strip searches.

Bennett often travels from Stockholm to Helsinki by overnight ferry and on one trip he saw Wagner's *Parsifal* at the castle on an island at Savonleena in Northern Finland.

An avid diarist and interested in the different views of society, he makes copious notes of his conversations with people from all walks of life including actors, pilots, bankers, students, opera singers, TV producers and directors and publishers and writers – a virtual A-Z of subjects. Many of Bennett's interviewees must be fascinated by their interrogator as many of the conversations last for an hour or more.

Bennett's penchant for travelling abroad with the bare minimum of luggage was the basis of an article he wrote in 'New Traveller' magazine. Whether it be backpacking or just plain old ordinary sightseeing, travelling light appeals to those who don't want to be lugging too many suitcases around and in the new age of airline security, less baggage means less cost and the less time wasted in security checks. Bennett's New Age travel discipline involves a coat with many sewn-on inside pockets containing a space blanket, disposable paper underwear, legal plastic cutlery, various paraphernalia and flat bundles of home-made file cards held together with rubber bands which are the repository of Bennett's travel notes and interviews penned in his

indecipherable scrawl with a fine tipped black felt pen.

Bennett's favourite European destinations include the Greek island of Skiathos where he has become almost one of the locals and has a permanent reservation on the top floor of a hotel overlooking the harbour. At Skiathos his routine involves a short bus trip to Maratha Beach, then a three hundred kilometre swim to a secluded sandy beach which he has named 'Paradise Beach'. He breaks the routine with bouts of waterskiing at Banana Beach.

Another of Bennett's regular routes takes him to Dubrovnik via Venice and Rovinj. Dubrovnik has a music, dance and opera festival each year for six weeks in July and August. He stays at a hostel for A\$20 per night and has long breakfasts in a sunny courtyard. The added attraction at Dubrovnik is supplied by beautiful Scandinavian girls who come to sunbake topless.

A walk through the old part of town brings Bennett to a rocky beach via the lift of a local hotel where he then swims 200 metres to 'Pirates' Cove' which is a natural rocky amphitheatre some thirty metres wide by forty metres deep and twenty metres high with a pirates 'escape' boat hanging by ropes from one of the walls. Here he sunbakes in the nude and fantasizes by singing 'For I am a Pirate King' and other songs. Bennett's adrenalin is on a constant high during his annual adventure in Europe and he rates one day there as being equivalent to a month in Australia. Most days Bennett goes from being a 'Pirate King' back to old Dubrovnik where he takes a fifteen minute ferry ride to Lokrum Island which has an inland seawater pool fed by underground caves with tame peacocks wandering around paying scant attention to humans. Most

evenings are spent at the Rectory Atrium listening to classical music by some of Europe's leading artists. It was George Bernard Shaw who said of Dubrovnik, 'If you want to find Paradise, go to Dubrovnik'.

Bennett often stays at Rovinj on the Istria Peninsula of Croatia on his way to and from Dubrovnik – again staying at one of his favourite hotels overlooking the harbour. Taking a ferry to Red Island he usually sunbakes for a while then hires a canoe and paddles his way from island to island. Bennett is fascinated by the Croatians with their extroverted folk dancing and singing. The usually warm and sunny European summer is at its attractive best in Skathios, Dubrovkin and Rovinj.

Bennett's main stamping ground has been Carlton since his early Caroline Street, South Yarra days. In today's money he gave \$1200 to help get the *Melbourne Times* established – which became a howling commercial success as a throwaway publication featuring a huge real estate advertising content. One of the early founders of the *Melbourne Times* was my once wife, Anne Polis. A report in the *Melbourne Times* about the opening of a local garden to the public led to Bennett firing off a letter to the editor criticising the garden's socialist left owner as a hypocrite and signing off as 'Otto Bismarck' on behalf of the 'Carlton anti-trendy society'. The offended gardener alleging libel, sought legal advice from lawyer/Labor politician John Button.

After seeing *The Removalists* by David Williamson, Bennett conducted a reading of *Dreams of the Steppenwolf* by Herman Hesse, with Williamson in the audience, making a comparison of similarities of that book with Williamson's play and tying all that into his run-in with Peter Poynton at the Carlton Club Hotel which resulted in the Police Association incident.

Bennett's desire to take legal action in this matter had cold water tipped on it by John Button.

Another of Bennett's quirks was to hand out free books that appealed to him to friends. On one such occasion he bought ten copies of *Radical Chic* and *Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers* by celebrated author Tom Wolfe and handed them out.

In 1973 whilst sunning himself on the grassy median strip in Canning Street Carlton, Bennett was watching the auction of the house at 116 which was adjacent to his. Tony Knox the editor of the *Melbourne Times* who knew Bennett, was standing nearby and flippantly suggested that Bennett buy the house. Prior to Knox's gratuitous advice, Bennett had not the slightest intention to purchase, nor had he even inspected the house. The next thing Bennett knew his hand was in the air and he drove the bidding up from \$32,000 to the sale price of \$38,000 offered by the final bidder and subsequent owner. The property was renovated and sold for well over \$600,000 in the late 1990s.

Bill Collins, not to be confused with the famous race caller, was a local Carlton identity who had been a slaughterman and attached himself to people like Germaine Greer and other luminaries. He demonstrated his lack of social graces by wetting a guest bed at Tim Burstall's Carlton home on the occasion of Burstall's and my wedding in 1984. A bad drunk, Collins stole a large 'Seeing Eye' plastic Labrador filled with donated coins from Jimmy Watson's Wine Bar in Lygon Street, Carlton. In court, Bennett gave character evidence for Collins describing him as 'reliable' and his action out of character while Alan Watson, the Lord Mayor of Melbourne in 1993 sat at the back of the courtroom rolling his eyes.

### Epilogue

When allied troops and reporters flooded into Nazi Germany at the end of WWII, the world was exposed to the horrors of the concentration camps where people of all races and religions had suffered and died. Little did one think that 62 years on, the debate between those defending the Holocaust and those that questioned it would still be running red hot. Our TV screens and media are still running Holocaust inspired movies and stories and Holocaust museums are in most Western countries. Germany and other countries have legislation that can imprison Holocaust deniers.

However, the general population by and large has become detached from the high emotion that once surrounded the Holocaust and the situation in the Middle East has contributed greatly to this. The long running and tragic Israel – Palestine dispute has muddied the waters, with Jews being described as just as bad as the Nazis by those in the West who support the

Palestinians. Further confusion is created when Jewish lawyers defend Muslims facing terrorism charges and Israelis are seen on the TV news demonstrating against their government's policy on Palestine. The Muslim – Jewish question aside, reports of increased anti-Semitism come in from all parts of the Western world and it is obviously increasingly difficult for Jews to continue casting themselves in the role of perpetual victim.

As John Bennett travelled from one side of the political spectrum to the other, he was swept up in the Holocaust debate when he started to question the status quo and in Australia he became the lightning rod for those for and against. There is no doubt that his engagement has cost him very dearly when measured in dollar terms and the very considerable effects on his health. The physical and mental stresses inflicted on him year after year by his many enemies supported by the media have been enormous and Bennett

has mainly stood alone, supported by just a few individuals whose names have quickly faded. He is still subjected to personal attacks that serve to indicate there are many who have not forgotten about him. In recent times he visited Horsham, the place of his birth and paid a sentimental visit to the Bennett family home. Speaking cordially with the young son of the new owners, the pair were interrupted by a mobile call from the son's father with the son telling his father about Bennett's presence. Bennett could hear the phone crackling and the bemused son handed the mobile to Bennett. 'You're a bloody racist bastard and I want you off the premises or I'll call the police,' the father yelled. Bennett shrugged his shoulders and bid farewell to the confused son.

John Bennett still travels overseas and publishes *Your Rights* but these days hardly mentions the dreaded 'H'.

\*\*\*

[John Pasquarelli ended writing this biographical sketch in 2007- ed.AI.]

---

### AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE

## Reflections on the Life of John Bennett of Melbourne, Civil Libertarian and Culture Hero

By: NIGEL JACKSON - [nigeljacksonpoet@hotmail.com](mailto:nigeljacksonpoet@hotmail.com) - Melbourne, 29 July 2013

On 27<sup>th</sup> July a death notice was published in Melbourne's premier newspaper *The Age* which read as follows: 'Writer, publisher, lawyer, adventurer and all-round funny man. Thoughtful and kind to your friends and family. John, you felt my pain when things went badly wrong for me. You gave me the emotional support I needed. John, you were so much fun; we had so many laughs. Sleep in peace, my wonderful friend. I will miss you so. - Lindy.'

From this I learned that my long-term fellow intellectual and political activist John Bennett had died.

What a sad moment; but what a wonderful tribute!

It appears that John's body had been discovered in his small Carlton house on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, his arms folded and his cat beside him. There is confusion over how old he was. One of his friends, John Pasquarelli, believes he would have turned seventy-seven in November and David Irving has listed him as being seventy-six when he died. On the other hand Wikipedia currently states that he was born on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1944.

There is also uncertainty over the fate of his library. Pasquarelli,

Fredrick Töben and I have been in contact with Bennett's sister and her husband, Mr and Mrs K. R. Nash of Abbotsford; but we have been unable to receive assurance that his books will not be destroyed. It appears that a death notice was published in the other Melbourne newspaper, the *Herald Sun*, stating that cremation would follow; but there does not seem to have been any funeral service as such, and there is no talk of any memorial service. One is reminded of Mozart and his unknown pauper's grave.

[On 23 July 2013 in Melbourne's *Herald Sun* the following appeared without giving the date-of-death: BENNETT, – John Tuson. Passed away peacefully. Aged 76 years. Loved son of Ian and Enid Bennett (both dec.). Loved brother of Jocelyn (dec.), Gail and Pam. Brother-in-law of Ken and Clem. At peace. Privately cremated. – ed. AI]

I last saw Bennett on 8<sup>th</sup> February when, at his invitation, I visited him in his little house at 122 Canning Street. As usual a mini-jungle of bamboo almost hid the façade from the view of passers-by. I was ushered into his front room, which smelt musty and looked a mess. I felt sorry to think that such a fine man was living in such shabby and disordered conditions.

Bennett took me to a nearby hotel in Brunswick Street, one of his favourite eating places, and we had lunch. I noticed that his conversation showed signs of dementia or Alzheimer's disease. He would ask the same question ten minutes later with no recollection of the answer I had given him. He told me quite frankly that he knew his mind was gradually failing. I remembered a time a year or so earlier when I had called on him and found him taking medicine from a locked container which only a visiting district nurse could open. I wondered what he was suffering from; but he responded evasively to my queries. I had been puzzled by his sudden withdrawal from political action in recent years. It seems that ill health must have been the reason – or one of them.

At the end of our meal in the hotel Bennett did not walk back to Canning Street with me, but suddenly told me he would go to another of his haunts in Brunswick Street. I found myself abruptly farewelled. And that was the last I saw of a very remarkable man.

## II

John Bennett first entered my life when we were fellow students at the University of Melbourne in the

late 50s and early 60s. Wikipedia states that he graduated with honours in law in 1958 and arts in 1966; but I remember him simply as an interesting and talkative person who was dating an acquaintance of mine, a charming and willowy blonde named Janice Llewellyn. As can be confirmed by Lindy's death notice, Bennett was no mere dry intellectual; nor was he a puritan.

Perhaps my next clear memory of the man is that of his battle of correspondence in *The Age*, I think in 1979. He was defending Holocaust revisionism and Arthur Butz's book *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*. As a man who had recently engaged vigorously in fourteen years' public campaigning to defend Rhodesia, I knew how arduous such participation is; and I thought to myself: 'Thank God, I'm not involved in *that* controversy!' But later on it found me anyway.

Another firm recollection concerns the time in 1984 when Bennett was sued over the contents of his booklet *Your Rights, 1984* by the distinguished Jewish barrister Aaron Castan QC. The case was argued for Castan by another distinguished Jewish barrister, Alan Goldberg, whom I had met at university, where we studied Latin together, and whom I greatly liked. Bennett had made the mistake of including very controversial material in the booklet and then placing on the back cover reviews of previous editions by various prominent critics. The implication was that they supported his latest controversial views, which some of them did not. It is a pity that Bennett had not stated clearly that these comments related to earlier editions of *Your Rights*, which did not include the new and sensitive material. I think Castan sued him under the Trades Practices Act for false advertising. Bennett decided that he did not have the funds to pursue the case and settled. At much the same time many copies of the booklet, kept in storage

somewhere, were sabotaged by persons unknown.

I remember talking to Goldberg in the courtroom and hearing him assure me that the matter was not a free speech issue. 'Oh, yes it is, Alan!' I replied. 'Surely you can see that?' And in that small conversation is the essence of the controversy that hung over Bennett's life for the last three and a half decades.

## III

In the late 70s a challenge was mounted to the hitherto almost universally upheld understanding that Nazi Germany had engaged in a horrific attempt to exterminate its Jews by means of gas chambers in which several millions had been killed. I grew up accepting that as just as much a historical fact as the assassination of Julius Caesar or the Battle of Hastings in 1066. In France a university professor named Robert Faurisson published a claim that the alleged homicidal gas chambers had never existed. A German judge, Wilhelm Stäglich, published the book *The Auschwitz Myth* with the same perspective. And an American engineering professor, Arthur Butz, published his book, *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, in which he argued that what became known, simply, as 'the Holocaust' was 'the hoax of the Twentieth Century'.

Bennett, who had helped establish the Victorian Council for Civil Liberties – now Liberty Victoria – in 1966 and who was its secretary, decided to investigate these startling theses. He did so by going to the Heritage Bookshop at 273 Little Collins Street, the headquarters of what he understood to be a notorious 'extreme right' or 'fascist' group known as The Australian League of Rights. Bennett later told me that he had entered the bookshop with considerable trepidation, as he did not know what sort of persons might run it – fascist thugs and fanatics, perhaps, who would spot him as a dissenter at once. He was

surprised to find very ordinary, everyday Australians running the place; and he bought a copy of Butz's book.

He experienced a 'road to Damascus' conversion, believing that the book mounted a credible case which should be publicly discussed and not just jeered off the stage. There followed the correspondence in *The Age* which I have mentioned. There also followed trouble with his associates in the VCCL, who were unpersuaded by Bennett's report of what he had found and shocked that he had fallen victim to what they regarded as arrant and pernicious nonsense. The upshot of this was that Bennett was expelled. He felt very sad and bitter about this, as he once told me himself. He felt that they had not been true to the ideals that they and he espoused. Alan Hughes was one person whose stance had particularly disappointed him.

Bennett founded a rival group, the Australian Civil Liberties Union, which, so far as I know, never became much more than a splinter community in the field. I can only recall attending one ACLU function, at which there may have been forty or more people present, many of them strongly anti-communist persons of European origin, some of these undoubtedly traumatised by the horrors of the world war they had experienced. The ACLU never escaped from its 'outsider' status.

#### IV

Bennett worked from 1974 to 1996 for the Legal Aid Commission of Victoria. During that time he published year after year his *Your Rights* booklet, updating it annually. It was a brilliant concept: a small 100-page paperback of practical advice for the ordinary person on how to deal at law with a wide range of matters from crime,

neighbours, tenants, wills, pensions and compensation to marriage, divorce, children's rights, births, deaths, house purchase, consumer rights and the police. Throughout its long period of publication, it was sold at newsagents around the state and perhaps further afield. With most of it Bennett's political opponents had no argument at all: it was practical, sensible and inoffensive.

However, as time went on, Bennett began to include more and more sensitive and controversial views, usually under the general head of freedom of speech. He also added material strongly questioning immigration and multicultural policies of governments and other powerful institutions. He became very critical of the campaigns against 'Nazi war criminals' and in favour of racial hatred and vilification legislation, seeing belated war crimes trials as fundamentally unjust and the legislation contrary to intellectual freedom. He would have argued that the whole drift of his publication was to enable and open up public debate; but his opponents saw it negatively as the expression of ethnic prejudice and anti-Semitism.

#### V

Bennett became a figure of world importance to historical revisionism and, especially, Holocaust revisionism, which its opponents insist on misleadingly calling 'Holocaust denial'. The USA's largest nationalist-revisionist publisher, Willis Carto, appointed him to the board of his Institute for Historical Review - IHR where Bennett associated with men like Arthur Butz, Robert Faurisson and Ernst Zündel. He also co-operated with the Adelaide Institute, run by Dr Fredrick Töben, and with The Australian League of Rights, many

of whose national seminars he attended. He was a financially generous contributor to the revisionist cause.

Ironically, in the month of his death Bradley Smith has published a remembrance in *Smith's Report* No. 197 of how, together with revisionist David McCalden, Bennett had approached him in 1979 on the mezzanine of a Los Angeles hotel during a Libertarian Party convention and stunned him by giving him a copy of a newspaper article arguing that the story of six million Jews being slaughtered by the Nazis was untrue. Smith has played a major role in publishing and supporting revisionist material, including that now circulated through the website of *Inconvenient History*. Plainly Bennett has been a hugely influential figure for historical revisionism.

Throughout the years I would receive, almost weekly, photocopies of relevant articles from the press, with Bennett's comments scribbled in the margins in spidery black handwriting. He was indefatigable in promoting the causes he believed in.

In the future it is to be hoped that one or more learned articles will be published, closely analysing, in a fair and free spirit, Bennett's contribution to the political life and understanding of his time. Regardless of how right or wrong he will be found to have been in his controversial writings and activities, there is no doubt at all that he was a man of very great personal courage and integrity who deserves to be honoured by all those who cherish truth and the defence of free political orders.





**A few days before his death John Bennett enjoys a cup of coffee with Fredrick Töben at their usual haunt at Studley Park on the Yarra Banks just a few minutes' drive from Bennett's 122 Canning Street Carlton home.**

On this day Töben noted that Bennett's exceptional brightness and alertness, which had faded somewhat over the past couple of years, was again evident – even noting that Bennett had groomed himself and removed that bushy beard of his.

Bennett's early embrace of dialectic materialism shaped his value system. This mode of thinking – Marxism derived from Talmudism – is a win-lose thought pattern that rejects any forms of idealism, for example, concepts such as truth, beauty, love are considered to be social constructs.

The Hegelian dialectic on the other hand enables civilising impulses to flourish because it is not a death-dialectic but rather a life-giving thought process, as exemplified in

**thesis=man;  
antithesis=woman;  
synthesis = child,**

and where the opposites come together to give life. Of course the Marxists wish to pit man against woman in a death struggle so that the androgynous person emerges as a synthesis, neither male nor female, which is quite bizarre and against Nature's basic principles.

The Marxist elimination-killing process in win-lose dialectic materialism animated political thinkers to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. The physical action that follows is, of

course, ethnic cleansing of those individuals labelled as belonging to the "class enemy" – as occurred when the Jewish Bolsheviks established the Soviet Republic that ethnically cleansed dissenting minds by the hundreds of millions, which was just what their Bolshevik predecessors did when they established the French Republic – ethnically cleansing the French European aristocracy, and this all for the Talmudic fiction of freedom, equality, fraternity that made up their collection of perverse principles/ideals.

Bennett matured through this Talmudic Marxist death-dialectic stage and realized its limitations, especially as regards those individuals and groups of individuals labelled as the enemy.

For Bennett the ideological liberation/maturation process began in 1978. Professor Arthur Butz writes:

I learned of John Bennett's existence after he wrote me on 17 August 1978, expressing admiration for my book and an intention to buy 100 copies for the purpose of distribution. At that time he was the Secretary of the Victorian Council for Civil Liberties and published an annual booklet *Your Rights*. Early in 1979 he distributed a thirteen-point memo, summarizing the considerations which had led him to support the revisionist position. It

created quite a storm. He left the VCCL in 1980 and set up the Australian Civil Liberties Union. His booklet continued to be published and distributed nationally until at least 2006, but it was no longer an annual event. He was a member of the original Editorial Advisory Committee of the JHR and remained there until the journal collapsed in 2002-3. He attended the first IHR Conference in September 1979.

Thus when Bennett began to open himself to new impulses contained in Revisionist thinking, especially about World War Two and in particular the assertions made by Jewish groups about the historical event labelled the "Holocaust", he became aware of Talmudic-Marxist Judeocentrism and supremacism contained within it. Bennett never talked about things Jewish but always referred to 'Turks'! The mainly Jewish-staffed VCCL inevitably declared him their enemy. By this time, though, Bennett had matured and again embraced the British Common Law principle of Natural Justice where the Hegelian life-giving dialectic is at home, and where the inevitable basic human disputes that life brings with it are settled in a civilised way – most of the time.

Here is a copy of the letter written on 1 July 1985 by Alan Goldberg to Mrs Joyce Steele.



## Executive Council of Australian Jewry

הוועד הפועל של יהודי אוסטרליה

The Representative Organisation of Australian Jewry

GPO Box 34222  
Melbourne Vic. 3001 Australia  
Telephone (03) 42 1254 or (03) 347 1719  
Fax: 4421428  
Cable: "Jewry", Melbourne

PRESIDENT

Mr J. Lohr (CBE, BA(Hon))

Vice PRESIDENT

Mr M. (Mervyn) S. Weiss, LL.B.

HON. TREASURER

Mr R. Kuper

VICE-PRESIDENTS

Mr John M. M. (J.M.M.)

Mr John L. (J.L.)

Mr M. (M.A.)

Mr F. (F.M.)

Mr J. (J.A.)

Mr J. (J.A.)

Mr J. (J.A.)

Mr J. (J.A.)

1st July 1985

Mrs. Joyce Steele O.B.E.  
23 Caloroga Street,  
WATTLE PARK. S.A. 5066

Dear Mrs. Steele,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chairman of the Anti-Defamation Committee of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the official roof body of Australia's Jewish community, about a serious and disturbing matter which concerns yourself.

The back cover of the recently published 1985 edition of John Bennett's Your Rights 1985 contains an endorsement of this book by yourself, together with a number of other similar endorsements. I attach a photocopy of this back cover in case you are unaware of this fact.

Given your distinguished record of achievement on the South Australian and Australian political scene, you are probably unaware that by your endorsement of Bennett's booklet, you appear to lend the weight of your personal reputation, as well as that of the South Australian Liberal Party, to the approval of what the entire Australian Jewish community regards as one of the most vile and offensive pieces of anti-Semitic racism to be published in Australia in recent years.

Although Mr. Bennett's book may indeed contain civil liberties information of value, you may be aware that for some years John Bennett has continuously been publicising the outrageous and wholly untrue lie that the Nazi Holocaust involving six million Jews during the Second World War - the mass murder of six million Jewish men, women and children by Hitler and the Nazis - did not occur but was a lie invented after the war by lying Jews for financial and political ends. Since you have read Mr. Bennett's Your Rights 1984 you will be aware of the odious lie which he repeats on pages 77-78 of his book, photocopies of which are attached. In an effort to whitewash the Nazis, Bennett also states (page 72, also attached) that "Hate sessions in the media directed against Hitler and the Nazis are so pervasive that a visitor from Mars might think WW II is still in progress." Numerous other statements attacking the Jewish people are also to be found in this work.

Internationally, such pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic statements have almost entirely been confined to obviously crank and extremist neo-Nazi groups in Europe and America while in Australia their main source

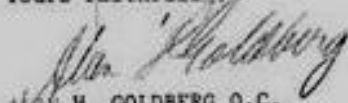
Constituent Jewish Boards of Deputies of Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Council of West Australian Jews Inc.  
Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, and The Australian Capital Territory Jewish Community.

of propagation, apart from Mr. Bennett, is The League of Rights, the extreme right wing body known for its anti-Asian, anti-Aboriginal and anti-Semitic racist attitudes.

We find it both surprising and regrettable that a former public official of your distinction is seen to lend the weight of her reputation to a view which is an obvious and total distortion of history and an insult to the many millions of victims of Nazi oppression. Your endorsement of a book containing Bennett's extremist and racist views will, we believe, come as a considerable shock to your many admirers, both in South Australia and elsewhere and will tarnish your high reputation for fairminded public service. It also gives considerable distress to Australia's Jewish community, especially to the 10,000 or more Australian Jews who survived Hitler's concentration camps, while your endorsement may help to legitimise the use of Bennett's work in schools and universities. We are also sure that your endorsement would be greeted with both amazement and consternation by the South Australian Liberal Party and by the South Australian media, should it become known.

In all the circumstances it would seem desirable and appropriate that you should disassociate yourself from Bennett's anti-Semitic views and I would be most grateful if you could take some appropriate steps to this end.

Yours faithfully,

  
 ALAN H. GOLDBERG Q.C.  
 Chairman, Anti-Defamation  
 Committee, E.C.A.J.

## REVIEWS OF YOUR RIGHTS 1984

*Your Rights 1984* is a very interesting book. It is invaluable. Every Australian citizen should have a copy. All the things I want to know about my rights and procedures are there, told in simple unequivocal language. The last chapter headed "1984 — Was Orwell Right?" alerts Australians to realise what is already happening to their country through very skilful brainwashing and propaganda.

**Lady Phyllis D. Cilento — Author of 14 books including "Medical Mother".**

While not always in agreement with the views expressed in "*Your Rights 1984*" I consider the publication a valuable, even a necessary watchdog of citizens' rights which, without vigilance, may easily be eroded.

**Sir James Darling, Former Chairman of the ABC.**

*Your Rights 1984* is well up to the high standards of earlier editions. The material is well chosen, well arranged and highly useful to a wide variety of people. Excellent value at \$1.95.

**Sir Walter Crocker, Former Lieutenant Governor of South Australia (1973-82). Former Australian Ambassador to many countries. Author of 7 books including *Travelling Back* and *Australian Ambassador*.**

*Your Rights 1984* is a very useful book to have . . . basically helping you with legal information you would otherwise have to pay for . . . The book *Your Rights 1984* should be most useful to most people.

**Doug Aiton 3DB Studio interview with author 22/3/84.**

An excellent legal primer for advising the layman. Well worth \$1.95.

**Joyce Steele OBE. Former Minister for Education for South Australia**

*Your Rights 1984*, contains all the material, advice and information of previous editions and only costs \$1.95, which must be one of the cheapest paperbacks in the country.

**Sydney Morning Herald 10/3/84.**





**L to R: Geoff Muirden Jennifer Jeffreys, Fredrick Töben, John Bennett having a break during Adelaide Institute's August 1998 International Revisionist Symposium in Adelaide**



**L to R: Professor Arthur Butz, John Bennett, Jorge Sabbag**





**L to R: Fredrick Töben, Claus Nordbruch, John Bennett at Rheingold, Geelong, before Nordbruch continued his December 2004-January 205 Australian tour.**



**John collects his house key**



**then disappears inside**





**John Bennett's defiant final salute ...**